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Freedom and the Sword: Literary Nationalism and Resistance in Napoleonic Italy

SHARON WORLEY

Censorship and Stolberg's Epistolary Method

Romantic feminist Louise Stolberg adopted the epistolary genre as a method of reporting on the Italian Revolution and the specter of tyranny. It also allowed for imagined spheres where art and literature converged with social and political constructs in war zones. Here the ideal Enlightenment vision of society did battle with the eventuality of martial defeat. From the perspective of the Enlightenment, these could only be grasped in the philosophical nature of democracy, and its expression in salon culture. The subversive influence of women had a pervasive effect on the authors and artists they patronized, creating a homogenous cultural paradigm that warranted victory or criminal conceit. The classical world encoded in the revival of literary texts dating back to Homer and Virgil, and the Renaissance works of Dante and Petrarch became the guiding touchstones for international freedom currents in a culture based on the tension between Enlightenment ideals and corrupt imperial political regimes. In retracing the steps of Homer or Virgil, one discovered a map of freedom in ancient monuments of the past which transcend time and place in the realm of international culture. While celebrating the past, these salon members actively worked for the future in covert strategies that supported Italy's freedom and anticipated the Risorgimento, literally the resurrection of Italian nationalism during the Revolutions of 1848 which lead to the unification of Italy in 1870. Their cultural texts and monuments can be viewed as a coherent propaganda program designed to rally support for their cause: ending Napoleonic hegemony in Europe. As Italians entered the modern era, the public sphere was created. Art, theatre and literature were domains for the exchange of ideas but also the education of the public. By promoting cultural texts that articulated the foundations of a new nationalism, Italians embraced their cultural heritage as the most distinguishing features of a new solidarity. Patrons and their artists and authors consciously chose those key nationalist features that would unite Italians on common ground in forming an imagined community. Unlike their European counterparts who appealed to a growing sense of individualism, Italian authors sought specifically to create a lightning rod patriotic stimulus through their writings. They are prefaced on the assumptions of an imagined community, and one which has mythical yet finite boundaries.¹

Civil War in Italy and the Landscape of Nationalism

Writing on December 21, 1805, following the victories of Napoleon in Venice and the Tyrol, Louise Stolberg, Countess d'Albany, and former wife of Charles Stuart, leader of a Jacobite Rebellion and the last Stuart Pretender to the British throne, confided to the archiprêtre Ansano Luti, professor of theology and canonical rights, that she found that the *captaine modern* [Napoleon] resembled Caesar, but without the virtues.² The ironic comparison could be humorous, but in light of the contemporary political climate, would more likely lead to censorship and arrest. By this time, such comparisons with Caesar had become associated with revolutionary connotations. When Stolberg's lover, Vittorio Alfieri, wrote his play about the assassination of Caesar by "The Second Brutus" in 1789, he dedicated it to the revolutionaries whose activities he and Stolberg observed from the windows of their Paris apartment. Before her execution, Jean Paul Marat's assassin, Charlotte Corday proclaimed the need to execute all Caesars to promote the will of the people. De Staël would later make such explicit comparisons in her survey *De l'Allemagne* in comparing Napoleon to Caesar and the barbarian Attila the Hun which resulted in the book's censorship. Subjected to censorship, the epistolary genre, was used by women as a sphere of action in the political arena, who found the courage to express their views.

From the vantage of Florence, the capital of Tuscany, Stolberg witnessed each phase of the occupation. She discussed each phase of the Italian military campaigns in her correspondence revealing that she was not only well versed in the salon culture of her day, but was also a keen observer of the political offensive and counter offensive. In the year prior to the death of Alfieri, she developed a close relationship with her confidant Luti. Writing in December 1802, Stolberg comments on the Hapsburg Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand III's renunciation of the throne in 1801 with the creation of the Kingdom of Etruria by Napoleon. The political machinations of France, Russia and Austria created the situation in which he was forced to withdraw from Italy. From any perspective, in her mind, "C'est un grand malheur pour la Toscane que d'avoir un souverain dans cet état"³ In December 1802, he was compensated with the Dukedom and electorate of Salzburg and made a Prince-elector to the Holy Roman Empire, while Napoleon's sister, Elise, became Grand Duchess of Etruria and ruled from her seat at the former Medici palace, the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Napoleon's sister Caroline became the Queen of Naples, and his sister Pauline married the Borghese Prince Camillo. Civil war was the result of Napoleon's invasions of Italy. The working classes revolted against army conscriptions imposed by the extended conflicts. The targets were initially Jacobins and subsequently the Napoleonic states. These conflicts sowed the seeds of revolt that would ultimately lead to the unification of Italy during the Risorgimento.⁴ Stolberg and members of her salon gave expression to the emerging nationalist agenda by giving aesthetic form to political realities.

Contemporary scholar, Sarah Corse, identifies three stages of nationalist literature: context, canon and the role of the nation. She suggests that a national literature emerges when it reflects the common values and experiences of a people within a national

context. As a result of critical evaluation, a canon of the best examples of literature emerges. Finally, taking into consideration the explicit function of the nation as the lightning rod of common feelings of patriotism creates a distinct genre of literature with nationalist features.⁵ The literature and art fostered by the Stolberg circle created a nationalist literature that responded to an evolving nationalist agenda. By relying on an accepted canon of Italian literature, authors like Alfieri and Ugo Foscolo added to a body of literature without alienating splinter political groups. Consequently, they encouraged the cogent features of nationalism that ultimately led to unification. As such, the Stolberg circle in Florence contributed to what Larry Isaac defines as POC (Production of Culture), or a body of work which intentionally reflects the political and social features of a particular movement thereby creating a distinct genre classification.⁶ While labor movements at mid-centuries created bodies of work that extolled or vilified the laboring classes, the Stolberg circle returned to what we might call an accumulated repository of nationalist literary references. The nation thus becomes an abstract and virtuous identity to whom people would swear their allegiance without disputing political points. The metaphor of nationalism in Italian literature sought one common point of reference: the acknowledgement of the greatness of Italian culture. At the same time, through literary reference and metaphor, Alfieri's dramas effectively addressed the problems of civil war, and the need to resolve conflicts in the best interest of the people as a whole.

Stolberg's political analysis within the epistolary genre was always accompanied by such literary and aesthetic references which encoded the political events with nationalist literary metaphors. Indeed, the Coppet group with which she was associated seems to have drawn up a cultural paradigm or template for nationalist independence which created an imagined community of future Italian patriots. As cultural anthropologists, they were at the same time political trespassers whose revolutionary activities constituted treason. Unlike the realist dramas of the latter nineteenth century, Stolberg's circle projected the contemporary political drama of transfers of power onto the plots of biblical and classical tragedies. She patronized those authors who drew upon an accepted literary canon which emphasized the overthrow of tyrants by the people. Alfieri's greatest tragedies were written in the years surrounding the American and French revolutions, but their nationalist resonance clearly applied to Italy's future in the wake of such events. The concept of kingship and its frailty could apply to each individual Italian state which sought to retain control of its territory and citizenry.

Alfieri first met Stolberg in 1776 at her salon in Florence. She was 24 and in 1772 married to the Last Pretender to the British throne, Charles Stuart. Charles himself was a revolutionary character whom Alfieri considered a tyrant. In 1745, with the promise of support from the French king Louis XV, Stuart invaded England with the intent of retaking the throne for the Stuart line and his Jacobite followers. He succeeded in capturing Holyrood, the ancient palace of Scottish kings, but was subsequently defeated when his 12,000 French soldiers did not arrive. Stuart escaped to France, while members of his army were executed, and Scots were banned from wearing kilts and playing

bagpipes by the English king George II. Following the death of Charles in Rome in 1788, Stolberg and Alfieri moved to Paris where they opened a literary salon and witnessed the French Revolution. The relationship that arose between Stolberg and Alfieri can be viewed as a revolutionary statement on his part. By wooing Stolberg away from Stuart, Alfieri succeeded in displacing a deposed would-be king, a theme repeated so frequently in his tragedies. After meeting Stolberg, his biographer writes that he decided not to leave Florence in order to be near her, and at the same time to expatriate himself from the city. As a member of the Piedmontese nobility and vassal of the King of Sardinia, Victor Amadeus III, Alfieri could not leave the kingdom without his permission, and all Alfieri's writings, regardless of the place of publication, had to be approved by the kingdom's censors. Violators were subjected to severe penalties. In an effort to free himself, Alfieri divested himself of his property and title, and turned it over to his sister Julia, Countess of Cumiana.⁷ The code of the prince or tyrant who fails to correctly interpret and implement the will of his subjects is a theme repeated throughout Alfieri's writings. The critical acceptance of his work was based on centuries of literary production and interpretation of an established biblical and classical literary canon. The application of these coded terms, king, vassal, tyrant, liberty, was dependent upon the context of its application. Thus, in referencing the literary text together with the political news in the context of correspondence was tantamount to treason because it identified the subversive followers of revolution. Alfieri, however, did not wait for random metaphorical associations, he dedicated his tragedies to specific political leaders. Thus, from the overt dedications of his "First Brutus" to George Washington on December 31, 1788, and his "Second Brutus" from Paris, 1789 to the Future People of Italy, each of Alfieri's literary works was a revolutionary statement applied to a contemporary political context.

With the aid of Alfieri, the classical canon was restored to its original context: Italy. The tyrannical chimeras of Caesar and Medici were superimposed on the political theatre of modern Italy. Trading their moral code and patriotic tendencies for the furtive criminal shadows of treason, the Stolberg circle shaped the literary features of Italian nationalist propaganda in its early stage. With the dedication of each new literary work, Alfieri advocated treason and the rebellion against tyranny. His writings attest to the effectiveness of Enlightenment period philosophy where authors such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire claimed to have uncovered existing natural laws of society in the *Social Contract* and *Idées républicaines*. The natural moral laws of society and government were revealed through Alfieri's tragedies and political tracts. Because they were encoded in the context of classical history and Enlightenment philosophy, they raised no immediate suspicions. It was only in the mode of correspondence that the context was revealed. Stolberg bore the risk. Her observations were not only limited to the observation of transfers of state under the Napoleonic empire, she also noted that as the sovereign of Venice, Ferdinand possessed the financial backing to wage wars. The bad government would not have the power to become a republic again. Ferdinand's Austrian alliance precipitated the invasion of Tuscany by Napoleon which resulted in the Treaty of Luneville in 1801. In 1797, he concluded a treaty with Napoleon which

resulted in heavy war levies paid to France, and the confiscation of some of Florence's most valuable artworks which were removed to the new *Musée Napoleon* in Paris. Stolberg's comparison of the political reality to the character, King Saul in the Bible, or Shakespeare's King Lear, the Celtic king who divides his estate among his three daughters after going mad, describes the plight of modern Italians who failed to rally to the cause of nationalism to prevent the division of the nation among the competing imperialistic forces of France and Austria. However, King Saul was closer to her heart. One of Alfieri's tragedies was about King Saul, and like many of his tragedies, is laced with revolutionary connotations, and specifically civil war. Alfieri's tragedy, *Saul*, was an apt analogy to the occupation of Italy. Civil war was the outcome of Napoleon's strategy as he occupied states, changed governments and replaced rulers. The tragedy is concerned with a battle between the Israelites and Philistines. However, the real conflict takes place between David and Saul, and Saul and his conscience. The prophet Samuel has died after anointing David the new king of the Israelites. Though David is married to King Saul's daughter, Michal, this enrages the old king who seeks to eliminate his rival. Without David's support as a warrior in battle, the Israelites are doomed to lose and perish. Saul has a dream in which the hand of God smites him with a thunderbolt. This event foreshadows the death of Saul and defeat of the Israelites under his leadership. Once he is surrounded by his enemies, Saul commits suicide by falling on his sword.⁸

The plot is concerned with the fitness of the king to rule. As in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Saul like Oedipus, demonstrates his inability to rule by instigating a paranoid purge of his rival. The sword is a motif which recurs throughout Alfieri's drama and signifies the rightful ruler through his valorous deeds. In 1803, Stolberg commissioned Fabre to create a painting based on the drama. Here we see Saul's vision of God wielding a thunderbolt like a sword over Saul's head. This foreshadowing of the old king's death is complemented by a group of dead soldiers on the right hand side of the composition (Fig. 1).⁹ The moral code is implied by the biblical context, while contemporary political context is given in the letter. When called upon, the people would assuredly follow the directions of plot structures which promoted common ethical values and the eradication of political oppression. If one did not support the moral right, one would suffer the moral consequences. The power of nationalist literature in this context appealed to an emerging public sphere who would become the audience of authors and politicians. It was consciously cultivated by Stolberg's literary salon circle whose members intended to channel revolutionary impulses into nationalist ones.

Through the epistolary genre, Stolberg emerges as one of the most powerful foreign patrons in Italy. Her influence stretched to the epicenter of the Italian revolutionary movement. The movement was directly inspired by the French revolutionary model, and sought to shape Italian nationalist identity in the midst of foreign invasion and conquest. In 1790, Stolberg's salon in Paris included the leading salon figures and revolutionaries such as Joseph and André Chénier, Mirabeau and Josephine de Beauharnais. Chénier wrote to Alfieri: "C'est une belle et bonne chose que cette liberté, mais il est bien dur de la voir prendre possession d'un pays."¹⁰ From

the vantage of Paris in 1790, clearly half the battle was won through literary and visual propaganda. The politicization of literary arts became the driving force behind Stolberg's salon and patronage which allied her with the greatest Italian patriots of her time. From her correspondence, one can determine the desired impact of her activities. She discovers that the political landscape of modern Europe was continually shifting, and that through her personal connections, she is able to guide the ship of state to its desired destination: a model of national unity and political democracy. Her close relationship with Alfieri was complemented by that with the Neoclassical painter and pupil of Jacques Louis David, Francois Xavier Fabre. Fabre painted the portraits of Alfieri and Stolberg (fig.s 3 & 4), along with other leading intellectuals and politicians in Italy such as Foscolo and Lucien Bonaparte. In her letter she mentions that Fabre had just received a commission for three paintings for the new church in Arezzo. In the same year, Fabre completed the painting entitled, *The Vision of Saul* (fig. 1). Stolberg relied upon such metaphoric parallels to encourage the unification movement in Italy from a grassroots movement of nationalist based revolutionaries who hinged their hopes on the fulfillment of a nationalist destiny to the authors and artists who gave voice and form to their political stirrings. She mentions that he received a commission for three history paintings from the church. The Cathedral of Arezzo itself was a repository of great renaissance art including work by Donatello, Giotto, Andrea della Robbia and Piero della Francesca. To the Gothic structure was added the Neoclassical chapel of the Madonna del Confort in 1796. Combing Neoclassical art with Italy's vast repository of religious art is a distinguishing characteristic of the Italy's nationalist movement which Germaine de Staël would later give expression to in her novel *Corinne* (1807). The need to communicate with poor illiterate peasants was achieved through the traditional medium of the Church.

The Literary Salon and Revolution

At Coppet, Switzerland de Staël created a networking of intellectuals who promulgated literary texts encoded with nationalist agendas. Many of these individuals had contact with Italy in a significant way creating a networking of cross cultural signatures. De Staël herself, author of *Corinne* (1807) set in Napoleonic Italy, Charles Bonstetten, *Voyages sur la Scène des six derniers Livres de l'Énéide* and JCL Sismondi, *Histoire de la renaissance de la liberté en Italie* visited and maintained close contact with Louise Stolberg's Florence salon throughout the Napoleonic wars. Stolberg's Florence salon can be regarded as one of the salon satellites of de Staël's Coppet salon; its fiercely anti-Napoleonic coterie created a visual text of Italy as the embodiment of cultural freedom and the classical ideal. Inspired by the fight for freedom against Napoleonic domination, Italy's greatest authors of the period, Alfieri and Foscolo, established important connections with Stolberg's Florentine salon during the most important periods of their careers which coincided with the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy. They promoted the classical, the medieval and Renaissance histories of Italy through their literary endeavors. Their literary output was complemented by the great contemporary Neoclassical artists patronized by Stolberg, Fabre and Antonio Canova.¹¹

Stolberg was politically active, like de Staël. In Paris she lived at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in the Faubourg Saint-Germain at the time of the Revolution of 1789, and frequented de Staël's salon that included Andre Chénier, whom she and Alfieri met in 1787, and Stephanie Genlis. Chénier was executed by guillotine four years later, while Stolberg and Alfieri escaped to England in 1791. When the French Republican army arrived in Florence in 1799, Alfieri and Stolberg were forced to flee temporarily, as they had been forced to flee Rome, when the French occupied the city in 1793. Napoleon's French Republican army entered the city of Florence, and by 1807, Elise Napoleon reigned as the new Kingdom of Etruria as Grand Duchess. Earlier in 1793, Fabre accepted a diplomatic commission and painted the portrait of the sister of King of Tuscany, Marie-Theresa of Austria. In 1802 Napoleon offered to restore the library confiscated from Stolberg and Alfieri during the Reign of Terror. While Napoleon restored her pension from Charles Stuart in exchange for Alfieri's library, he forced her to reside in Paris from 1809-10 where she was interrogated about her politically subversive salon, and a possible Stuart heir. Her relationship with Napoleon became further antagonized by his refusal to grant restore her annuity at this time.¹²

Fabre had also fled Rome when the French arrived, and rather than return to Paris, he moved to Florence where he was patronized by émigrés. Stolberg and Alfieri lived in Florence from 1793-1803 at their palazzo overlooking the Arno River, *Gianfigliazzi*, where Fabre became their intimate friend and they entertained the leading intellectuals of the day at Louise's salon. Following Alfieri's death in 1803, Fabre became romantically involved with Stolberg, and upon her death, she bequeathed him her art collection which formed the original collections of the *Musée Fabre* in Montpellier, France founded by Fabre. Fabre's Neoclassical paintings reflected the style of David's pupils in their Republican values and Classical subjects. They served as a counterpart to the liberal democratic political values of Alfieri himself who wrote important Neoclassical plays, but also expressed in his political views on literature and liberty in his writings *The Prince and Letters* (1778) and *Of Tyranny* (1800). Both works articulate the views on liberty de Staël and her circle during a period of revolution, conquest and rebellion.

The Prince and Letters (1778) is written from the historical perspective of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, with the recent history of modern absolute monarchy and censorship in mind. Alfieri experienced difficulties with censorship based on the content of his plays. His play *The Pazzi Conspiracy* that recreates the assassination of Giuliano de Medici during the Italian Renaissance as a Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* love story was prohibited from production without the permission of the Pazzi family. Written prior to the French Revolution, Alfieri describes the prince as a tyrant who lacks an appreciation of the liberal arts, and seeks to dominate the greatest number of people. In order to wield his control over the population, Alfieri concludes that the prince prefers "ignorance and blindness" in his subjects. Alfieri concludes that the purpose of literature is to instill political and moral virtues in citizens. Since the principality will not protect letters, in Alfieri's view, letters become perfected when they demonstrate liberty under a corrupt regime.¹³ *Of Tyranny* (1800) completes Alfieri's definition of the unjust absolute

ruler, but more importantly, both works articulate the context in which his Neoclassical plays were performed. Tyranny, defined by Alfieri, is a criminal activity in which the ruler fails to uphold the laws of the state. However, he holds Rousseau's position, that the only valid laws are those that have been made by elected representatives as "social contracts" and reflect the "will of the majority."¹⁴ Thus, any ruler acting without a legislature and a constitution was corrupt and criminal, in his view. This view of tyranny immediately placed Alfieri in opposition to Napoleon. Alfieri's tragedies reflect his political sentiments in their use of heroic archetypes that uphold liberty against tyranny. When Alfieri's Brutus commands the assassination of Caesar, he does so as a representative of liberty executing a tyrant who refuses to restore Rome's Republican freedoms.¹⁵

Italy as a Code of Freedom: Alfieri's Two Brutuses

Alfieri decided to write his two Brutuses after receiving a letter in 1785 from Paris from the Countess of Albany, Louise Stolberg, telling him how much she enjoyed the performance of Voltaire's *Brutus*. Alfieri joined her shortly thereafter in Paris and wrote his versions of *Bruto Primo* and *Bruto Secondo*. Thus, the dramas coincided with the key events in the French Revolution. The dedications of his "First Brutus" to George Washington on December 31, 1788, and his "Second Brutus" from Paris, 1789 to the Future People of Italy, indicate the correlation he perceived between theatre and revolution. The heady days of the revolution were witnessed by Alfieri and Stolberg from their Paris apartment where they entertained the leading revolutionary intellectuals at their salon. The act of writing, publishing and performing the classical literary dramas was itself an act of revolution. The people would naturally refer to the example of history and great art for their political role models. Democracy was the implicit outcome of such literary formulas. The two Brutuses invoke the power of the people by demonstrating the sacrifice of blood relations for collective power. As such, they are revolutionary documents which invalidate class structures and replace them with Rousseau's collective will.

The plot of Alfieri's *The First Brutus* differs from Voltaire's and Catherine Bernard's (1647) versions in that the act of treason is limited to the signatures of Brutus's sons Titus and Tiberius on a petition to reinstate the Etruscan king. The sons are condemned to death by their father, and their only defense is that they hoped to appease the king's wrath if he attempted to retaliate against Brutus following the restoration of monarchy. The tragedy opens with Brutus's reference Lucretia's suicide following her rape by the king's son, Sextus, which sets the stage for the Roman's revenge against the Tarquins. Brutus himself withdraws the dagger from Lucretia's her still "palpitating heart." By overthrowing the Tarquin dynasty, the Romans establish the first Roman Republic in 509 BCE. What is remarkable about Alfieri's tragedies is that they are tailored for a revolutionary audience. The key characters proclaim their lines for contemporary audiences who would respond to key coded archetypes. The complexity of the plots has thus been simplified for modern audiences. They are tailored for an audience who would agree to support a revolutionary agenda. This would entail a violent and bloody

overthrow of the existing social structure. Key terms are repeated throughout which support the essential revolutionary acts of the lead characters. Blood, tyrant, sword, dagger, citizen are repeated in sequence throughout each drama. Alfieri, also introduces the people as separate character or chorus which reinforces the contemporary political application to revolutionary Paris and the future revolution in Italy. Act I Scene I opens with a dialogue between Brutus and Lucretia's widower Collatinus, later joined by the People. The terms flow in a sequence as follows: sword (ferro/pugnal_), blood (sangue_), sword, sacred, sorrow, revenge (vendetta), universal Rome, sword, sword, revenge, blood, Roman blood, universal vengeance, blood, liberty, revenged, dagger, Rome, citizens, blood, stigma, blood. The modifying phrases specify their correct interpretations:

COLLATINUS:

...Restore to me at once
That **sword** of mine, with which beloved **blood**
Is reeking yet...In my own breast...(1.1:1-4)

BRUTUS:

This **sword**, now **sacred**, in the **breast** of others
Shall be immerged, I swear to thee. – Meanwhile
Tis' indispensable, that in this forum
Thy boundless sorrow, and my just **revenge**
Burst unreservedly before the eyes
Of **universal Rome** (1.1: 5-10).

Col. Rendimi, or via, mel rendi
Quel mio **pugnal**, che dell'amato **sangue**
Gronda pur anco...Entro al mio petto...

Bruto. Ah! pria
Questo **ferro**, omai **sacro**, ad altri in petto
Immergerassi, io 'l guiro. — Agli occhi intanto
Di **Roma intera**, in questo foro, é d' uopo
Che intero scoppi e il tuo **dolore immenso**,
Ed il **furore mio giusto**. (1.1)¹⁶

The nouns begin to resonate with universal and thus contemporary significance, as if calling upon all free people to join the revolutionary cause. The specific case of Lucretia becomes the battle cry for both ancient and future Romans to pick up their arms and discard their shackles of slavery. By extension, the audience understand the tradition of Brutus within the context of the American and French revolutions.¹⁷

The *Second Brutus* takes place at the end of the Roman Republic with the stabbing death of Gaius Julius Caesar by the Senate led by Marcus Junius Brutus during the Ides of March in 44 BCE. Caesar had plunged Rome into civil war by attempting to assume full control of the republic as a dictator. The plot of Alfieri's *Second Brutus* is again concerned with the willingness of the patriot Brutus to sacrifice all, family, prestige

and power, to uphold the fidelity of the principles of the Republic. When Caesar begins to wield power like a dictator and war monger, Brutus gives the command to have him assassinated, despite the fact that Caesar is his natural father, and has named him as his successor:

BRUTUS:

I, as a son wept and entreated him:
And also, as a citizen conjured him
To drop the infamous design: ah! What
Did I not do, to change him from a king?
I e'en, entreated from him as a gift
Death; which from his hands I should more have prized
Than all his surreptitious royalty:
But all in vain: in his tyrannic breast
He had resolved to reign, or die. I then
The signal gave to kill him...(Sc.III;Act V)

Alfieri's experience of nationalism to this point was conditioned by Italian politics in which petty tyrannical nobles vied with foreign powers to occupy and rule the diverse Italian states. When Alfieri followed the events of the American and French Revolutions, he followed the tide of a global movement towards democracy. Inspired by the Enlightenment and neoclassical revival, he embraced a literary code fashioned from the genre of Classical literature and history. The names had been invoked and re-invoked since the establishment of official theatres as organs of monarchy across Europe. By the late eighteenth-century however, the plots began to resonate with contemporary political convictions. Originally promoted by heads of state as vehicles for engendering patriotism and literacy, the plots soon applied to the discontent of contemporary citizens. When Alfieri invokes the name of Brutus, he supports revolution and democracy.

Alfieri's journey towards democracy began in the year of the American Revolution in 1776. He moved to Pisa and decided to confine himself to the study of Latin and Latin translations of Greek tragedies, in addition to reading Italian authors such as Dante and Petrarch, Alfieri says that he traveled to Tuscany in April of 1776 in hopes of "unfranchising" himself. His first tragedies, *Philippe* and *Polynice* had been written in French. He vowed afterwards to become as "proficient in my native tongue as the most learned philologist in Italy."¹⁸ At Pisa, after being introduced to the leading *literari*, he planned to write the sequel to *Polynice*, *Antigone* in Tuscan verse, while translating *Polynice* into verse. He found it was important to distinguish between iambic and epic verse. Using "eleven syllables in epic composition, it was necessary to form an arrangement of words, of sounds perpetually varied and broken, of phrases short and energetic, which distinguish tragic from all other kinds of blank verse..."¹⁹ Alfieri believed that the study of Italian authors would result in his ability to synthesize their phraseology with his own [political] ideas.²⁰ Alfieri's study of Classical and Italian

authors is entirely dependent upon his perception of contemporary Italian history, and his desire to see a new unified Italian nation emerge from the revolutionary movement initiated by the American and French revolutions.

The history of Italian rule underwent a transition during Alfieri's time. The old noble families like the Medici or Farnese who had historically ruled the Italian city states died out and were replaced by modern enlightened despots who ruled portions of Italy along like colonial holdings. Naples and Sicily for example, were ruled by the Spanish Habsburgs until 1700 until the last ruling heir died without issue. Sicily was subsequently occupied by French and Austrian armies vying over the Spanish dynasty's holdings. Thus, Italian rulers were frequently Europeans who received territory in Italy as a result of a European or colonial conflict. When the last ruling Farnese in Parma died, the throne went to his niece, Elizabeth Farnese, who ruled in Madrid as the Queen of Spain. Her son Don Carlos, subsequently acquired the duchies of both Parma and Tuscany.²¹ Alfieri's later tragedy about the Medici heir Don Carlos, then resonates with the history of Italy and the transition of states prior to the Napoleonic era. In choosing his themes, Alfieri made corollary references to contemporary and historic kings. The First and Second Brutuses were preceded by his play *Agis* which Alfieri dedicated to Charles I of England on May 9, 1786:

As you received your death from the sentence of an unjust parliament, so this king of Sparta received his from the wicked judgment of the Ephori. But just as the effects were similar, so far were the causes different. Agis, by re-establishing equality and liberty, wished to restore to Sparta her virtue and her splendor; hence he died full of glory, leaving behind him an everlasting fame. You, by attempting to violate all limits to your authority, falsely wished to procure your own private good: hence nothing remains of you; and the ineffectual compassion of others alone accompanied you to the tomb.²²

From the perspective of Italian patriotism, he made allusions to European wide events and historic cultural and literary landmarks. His literary journey was one of heroism. He plunged the depths of Italian culture and history to collate a concise program for the nation's progress toward democracy. This program of self-chastisement and renewal could not have been possible without Stolberg. She inspired him as surviving model of both monarchical dynasty and literary genii like Dante's Beatrice. She represented both the Stuart dynasty in exile, and the revolutionary impulse to displace the authority of foreign interloper. Alfieri writes in his autobiography that he was motivated to become an author and write tragedies by "an ardent love, and a hatred approaching to madness against every species of tyranny..."²³ The transposition of historic characters onto literary ones is a hallmark of Alfieri's drama, and one that extended to his personal relationships and political figures. For example, when Stolberg's estranged husband, Charles Stuart died in Rome in 1788, Alfieri writes that "she had lost in him only a tyrant, and not a friend."²⁴

In the years preceding the French Revolution, Alfieri came to the realization that the people had been betrayed by politicians and philosophers who promised them freedom. His dramas include specific motives and formulas for his characters as a blueprint for anyone who seeks to carry out revolutions in any time or place. He refers to the statement by Machiavelli to the extent that his "heart was torn asunder on beholding the holy and sublime cause of liberty betrayed by self-called philosophers."²⁵ If philosophers as great as Rousseau and Voltaire could not incite the required revolutionary impulse, then it was up to dramatists to act out the prescriptive. The actors could be transformed and transcribed onto individual character parts.

Stolberg's salon was undoubtedly an important influence in researching de Staël's novel, *Corinne*. The republican themes and Medici reference were personified in the figures of the nobility she entertained in her salon. J.C.L. Sismondi remained in constant contact with Stolberg as de Staël wrote the novel, apprising her of its progress, and promising to send her a copy.²⁶ Italy personified the republican hopes of the literary salons connected with de Staël. Its classical heroes immortalized in the revival of classical antiquity and Neoclassicism became the standard model throughout Europe during the Napoleonic Wars, inspiring patriotism and revolt against Napoleonic imperialism. Italy, during the occupation by Napoleon, as predicted by Alfieri, inspired some of the greatest Republican literature and art while oppressed by the tyranny of censorship. The common themes of de Staël, Sismondi and Alfieri, reveal literature as a genre for portraying heroic role models for emulation by contemporaries attending the salon. Literature and art merged with life, creating a unified propaganda front and a continuation of the goals of the early Republic to defeat the hydra of tyranny and create an ideal state based on liberty.

Between the years of Napoleon's first invasion of Italy in 1795 and his defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Italian culture underwent a remarkable period of transition in which its unique features of nationalism were created. Unlike the period style of Neoclassicism which swept across Europe in the 18th century, Italian nationalism sought to identify those signifiers that expressed Italian hopes of independence and patriotism. In this context, Neoclassical literature and artwork becomes uniquely Italian in its derivation from ancient and modern Italian sources. The love of country refers solely to Italia, and the romantic life cycle celebrated by its patriot, Foscolo, suggests a variant of nature worship akin to German Romantic nationalism. Italian nationalism derives from a love of *patrie* which runs deep into the roots of the Italian soil and extends back to the time of the Classical world. The writings and artwork celebrated by these modern poets included Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Michelangelo plus classical sources like Sophocles. The most profound expressions of patriotism would be the sacrifice of oneself for their country. It is here that Foscolo's writings provided the appropriate context to commemorate the sacrifices of Italy's patriots.

The church of Santa Croce in Florence houses the tomb monuments of some of Italy's leading cultural heroes suggesting a conscious writing of history that imprints itself literally upon the soil of *patrie*. Foscolo, Alfieri and Stolberg's tombs joined those

of the cultural heroes they promoted through their writings and patronage: Alfieri's tomb commissioned by Stolberg from Canova in 1808 (fig. 2), lies between the tombs of Michelangelo and Machiavelli. The Renaissance artist, Lorenzo Ghiberti and architect, Leon Battista Alberti are also buried there. The church also houses artwork by some of the greatest Italian Renaissance artists: Giotto, Luca della Robbia, Vasari, Donatello and Andrea Orcagna.

The European perception of Italy, according to modern scholar, Joseph Luzzi, went through a transition between 1775 and 1825 from being "Europe's "museum" to its "mausoleum."²⁷ Authors Foscolo, de Staël and Goethe facilitated this change through their writings which shifted to a new focus from Neoclassicism to the repository of bodily remains and tombs. While Luzzi's analysis and comparison of de Staël *Corinne* (1807) and Foscolo's later *Lettore scritte dall'Inghilterra*, written in exile in England illuminate the ex-patriot's perception of the disparaging remarks about modern Italy implicit in *Corinne*, a comparison of *Corinne* and Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1806) reveal far more similarities among the three authors. Following Goethe's example, Foscolo and de Staël created a genre in Italian culture that celebrated the relics of patriotism during an age of Napoleonic tyranny. Indeed, de Staël's *Corinne* appears to be the feminist successor to Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and Foscolo's *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*. The shift to the bodily remains of great cultural heroes represented a shift from Neoclassicism to Romanticism that celebrated the soul of the individual as the ultimate expression of freedom. In a letter dated September 7, Florence, Foscolo's hero writes:

Open the window wide, Lorenzo, and from my room greet my hills
...you will find the solitary willow under whose weeping branches
I lay prostrate for many hours thinking of all my hopes. An when
you come near the summit you may hear a cuckoo which seemed
to call me every evening in its mournful meter... The tree in which
it used to hide itself casts a shadow over the ruins of a little chapel
where in ancient times a lamp used to burn before a crucifix. It was
shattered by the storm in that night which has left my spirit even
today, and as long as I live, terrified by shadows and remorse.
And those half-buried ruins in the darkness looked to me like
sepulchral stones, and I often thought of erecting my tomb there
among those secret shades. And now? Who knows where I shall
leave my bones?²⁸

This question is answered by the poet in a series of letters in which he confesses his love for his country in the guise of love letters to a woman, Terese. Etymology is significant, and the literal ruins of the stones become in the poet's mind, "the ruin of whole peoples" who exploit the term liberty. The love letter to his nation continues in Foscolo's subsequent sonnets, *Of Tombs*. We learn that the poet's intense Romantic feelings find corporeal expression in the monuments and literature and history of the Italians.

Foscolo gave form to a movement that would characterize Italian culture during the Napoleonic era. Intensely patriotic, the resistance movement of Italians became synonymous with Neoclassicism in all its myriad forms. Through literature and art, thinkers tried to grasp the essential elements of national culture that explained the unique characteristics of Italian culture and provided reasons for maintaining their independence. The list of monuments — literary and artistic — culminates in the preservation of their creator's tombs in churches. Christianity becomes the locus of the soul, and the tombs of the greatest writers and artists are enshrined in churches. The commitment to death demonstrates to Italians that their lives and culture will extend beyond the grave: "Shaded by cypresses and kept in urns/ Consoled by weeping, is the sleep of death..."²⁹

Healing the Rifts of Civil War within the Aesthetic Fabric of Nationalism

The networks of artists and authors included native Italians like Foscolo, Alfieri, and Canova, as well as Europeans who had embraced Italy as the embodiment of liberty and nationalism like Lord Byron, de Staël, Fabre and Stolberg. Europeans who formed part of this cultural milieu watched the advance of Napoleonic ambitions through a Italian-European lens of a code of freedom. Foscolo helped to initiate this movement. He was the first writer to place Italy's cultural heritage in the context of the Napoleonic advances into Italy. Drawn into de Staël's coterie through Stolberg's Florence salon, Foscolo's writings find echo in *Corinne* in the heroine's contemplation of Italian culture and monuments as an expression of the poetess/sibyl's soul and identity. Foscolo's poem *Of Tombs* precedes the publication of *Corinne* by a year in 1806, and embodies the same sentiments expressed by de Staël's heroine.

Foscolo's patriotic agenda differs however from that of Alfieri. Foscolo relies upon the literary traditions of Italians, without issuing a call to arms directly. In seeking to conjure the forces of nationalism, he falls back on dreams, myths and literary figures. Foscolo's literary output, like that of Stolberg's lover, Alfieri, was directly inspired by the Napoleonic invasions of Italy. When Foscolo moved to Venice in 1792, his talent was recognized by the salon hostess, Isabella Teotochi. Called the Venetian Madame de Staël by Lord Byron, or the Venetian Antigone by others, she was his first introduction to the literati who promoted Italy's nationalist cultural dialogue that produced the encoded lens of freedom. Foscolo's brief affair with the salonnier resulted in his retreat to the Euganean Hills which he reproduced as the setting for *Last Letters*.³⁰

His poem, *Of Tombs*, like his novel, *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* creates a mythology for contemporary Italy laid upon the foundations of its classical historic past. He concocts a formula that is elucidated by the encoded history of Italy. It is a creation myth which emerges from and returns to the dust of one's nation, one's ancestors, and quite literally, one's bones:

A force that never tires, wears all things out,
Never at rest; and man and tombs of men,
The final shape of things, and the remains
Of land and sea are all transformed by time.³¹

The timeless force described by Foscolo is the stuff from which nationalist hopes impinge. It takes form over the centuries in the creations of Italy's writers and artists, and ultimately, embodies what soldiers and patriots would find virtuous and moral in society during the Napoleonic wars in Italy. Foscolo reaches out to his fellow patriots and artists in arms. Victory is assured if they stand their ground and fight for their homeland. With victory behind him, Foscolo later looked back and wrote hymns in praise of his homeland. His *Hymn I* for example, creates a vision of the hill of Bellosuardo with Canova by his side. Venus is a recurrent theme in Foscolo's works, and is transformed into the goddess of liberty. The incantations to liberty cause her to emerge from the forum of the salon where women like de Stael and Stolberg make sacrifices to her name in the form of patronage of authors and artists who conjure her image by reinterpreting her forms from the past. She takes the shape of contemporary women as well, like Countess Antonietta Fagnani Arese who directly inspired his novel *Ortis*, and who referred to him interchangeably as Ortis and Werther in their correspondence while she was translating Goethe's novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.³²

The retaliation and revolt against Napoleonic hegemony among Italy's patriotic literati begins with Canova's statue, *Antigone Mourning the Dead Eteocles and Polynices* (1798-99) (Museo Civici Venenzia). Executed two years after Napoleon's descent into Italy, it commemorates the play by Alfieri, *Polynices*, written in Rome in 1781 shortly after Canova moved there from Venice. Alfieri's writing anticipated a civil war in Italy and the need to reinforce nationalist sentiments. His dedications and choice of acting cast show that he intended the plots to apply to contemporary and future culture politics in Italy in the wake of the American Revolution and prospects for a unified Italian republican state. The sequel *Antigone* begins with the decree of Creon regarding the burial of the two brothers who died fighting in the civil war. It was written a year later and "dedicated to Francesco Gori Gandellini, A Citizen of Sienna." When it was performed in Rome at the private theatre of the Spanish ambassador, Alfieri played the role of Creon. The Duke di Celi played Haemon, and the Duchess di Celi play Argeia; the Duchess di Zagarolo played the role of Antigone.³³ It begins with the death of the two brothers who die fighting in a civil war. According to the play by Sophocles (442 BCE), the declared king of Thebes, Creon, rules that Eteocles will be honored with a proper burial while Polynices will not. His body will be left out to rot and be devoured as carrion prey. When Oedipus's daughter, Antigone, defies Creon and secretly attempts to scatter some earth on her brother, Polynices's remains, she is punished with a death sentence and sealed in a tomb where she commits suicide.³⁴ The significance was important in the context of the Napoleonic invasions of Italy for it created a virtual civil war as Italians initially welcomed Napoleon as a liberator who defeated the ruling Hapsburg dynasty and established the Cisalpine republic. Their hopes of independence were quickly crushed as Napoleon continued his campaigns south toward the Papal States, confiscating Italy's greatest art treasures for the newly created *Musée Napoleon* along the way. Persuading Italians to join the cause of independence and expel the French became the focus of cultural programs fostered by salon women and the artists

and authors they patronized. The coded icons of king, tyrant, and rebel were rechanneled into the contemporary drama of citizen and revolutionary. If citizens swore devotion to the nation, they were prepared to sacrifice their lives to uphold its integrity. They were preparing to undertake such explicit revolutionary acts to preserve the nation.

When Napoleon deposed Pope Pius VI, Canova returned to his native city, Possagno. The city held great significance for him as being emblematic of his commitment to Italian independence and nationalism. Throughout the conflict between France and Italy, Canova remained loyal to the cause of his homeland despite prominent commissions he received from Napoleon. His oeuvre suggests that he served two masters, included his statue of Napoleon as the god, Mars. But clearly, those works he created of Italian subjects held the greatest personal significance. He personally later commissioned the Tempietto (1819) in Possagno where he and his brother, who inherited the statue from him in 1822, were buried. Canova had previously executed a painting depicting *Mourning the Dead Christ* which was located above the high altar of the Tempietto.³⁵ The resurrection of the dead, then, becomes a common theme in Neoclassical art and literature during the Napoleonic wars, suggesting the hopes for a union of Italian city states and the defeat of Napoleon. If the patriot-soldier's imminent death was too traumatic, it could be sublimated into the icons of family: mother-virgin, child, and Christ. Swearing devotion to a beautiful mother goddess, lady, queen, or virgin and preparing for the tomb or womb was aesthetically more palatable than engaging in overt acts of violent warfare. This is where the second tier of Italian nationalism in literature surfaces. And again, it was supported by a lengthy history of Italian art and culture spanning the period of ancient Rome and the cult of Venus to the Christian period of the Virgin Mary and the Vatican.

In de Stael's *Corinne*, the heroine returns to Florence from England prior to her death, and goes to *San Lorenzo* where she contemplates Michelangelo's tombs of the Medici. Bonstetten, who traveled back and forth between de Stael's and Stolberg's salons gave literary form to the steps of the nationalist "passion" with his biblical *Voyage sur la Scène des Six Derniers Livres de l'Énéide* (1808).³⁶ The creation of a myth of nationalism relies on reciting the heroes of the fatherland who over the course of centuries since the time of its founding by Virgil's Aeneas, are repeated in myriad forms that coalesce to form the nationalist colossus whose spirit is conjured by literary shamans to confront the threat of Napoleon. Members of Stolberg's circle created the literary equivalent to monuments such as France's *Pantheon of Great Men* in 1791 in Paris initiated with the removal of Voltaire's remains to the former Ste. Genevieve. Germany would later follow with its Valhalla of Germans (1830-44), commissioned from architect Leo von Klenze by Ludwig I of Bavaria in 1814, it is a Doric order temple filled with marble busts of great German writers and philosophers.³⁷

While one might recite the names of great male authors and artists who filled a national treasury over the centuries, the spirit of reincarnation lies in the female creative force. The abstract Neo-platonic concept of the goddess Venus becomes the resurrecting

force of the Virgin Mary through an alchemical process. In forming the Italian salon circles, women like de Stael and Stolberg revived the sacrificial rites of ancient goddesses and pagan worship. They conjured the spirits of nationalism and reinvigorated the new generation with the hopes of fulfillment. While Corinne muses on her future tomb in the Pantheon in Rome, she becomes the creative goddess sowing the seeds of future generation. The Neo-platonic concept of virginity had its origins in Renaissance Italy. Even Antigone's death becomes a resurrection of light when Creon opens her tomb to find the consummation of his son and his Oedipus's daughter in a suicide pact dedicated to the eradication of the king's tyranny. With the revival of classical antiquity, its pagan deities were interpreted as having a dual material and divine significance. Educated humanist Florentine patrons like the Medici could thus safely worship Christian monotheism and enjoy the fruits of their classical idealism and mythology simultaneously.

In 1823, Barbarina Brand, Lady Dacre's translation of Foscolo's *Essay on Petrarch* was published in London. This work together with Foscolo's "Essay on the Text of the Divine Comedy" (1825) would be his last published works prior to his death in 1827 and entombment at Santa Croce. Both literary works postulate the cyclical premise of Italian art and literature of the Napoleonic Age: nationalism and resurrection. As Stephano Josso argues, Dante was associated with both Italian nationalism and patriotism because of the political content of his work and life. He created a common experience for Italians in a "common imagination and rhetoric." They are termed imagined because they are continuities which only exist in the mind. By referring to the common cultural experience Dante's Inferno, Foscolo avoided the divisive political conflicts of civil war and focused on the theme of Love and the Virgin. Invoking Dante was tantamount to invoking Italian nationalism and its unique correlation between literature and patriotism. It was a tradition first revived by Alfieri who referred to Dante poetically as his "Great father Alighier/if from the skies/This thy disciple prostrate thou dost see/Before the gravestone, shaken with deep sighs..."³⁸ When Foscolo subsequently invoked Petrarch, he was building on the same revolutionary rhetoric which subsumed violent impulses to the common tree of Italian literature and the beautiful neo-platonic figure of Venus and the Virgin Mary who appealed to the literati and peasantry alike.

Although Petrarch has contrived to throw a beautiful veil over the figure of Love, which the Grecian and Roman Poets delighted in representing naked it is so transparent that we can still recognize the same forms. The ideal distinction between two Loves sprang at first from the different ceremonies with which the ancients worshipped the CELESTIAL VENUS, who presided over the chaste loves of girls and wives; and the TERRESTRIAL VENUS, the avowed tutelary deity of the gallantries of ladies, who played a distinguished part in those times....³⁹

According to Socrates: "Beauty, is illuminated by a light which directs and invites me to contemplate the soul which inhabits such a form ; and, if the soul be as beautiful as the body, it is impossible not to love it. But there can be no beauty of soul

without purity." In writing about his deceased lover, Laura, Petrarch investigates the nature of the soul as a reflection of perfect beauty. The adulation nationalist inspired art and literature by salon women reveal the nature of the soul through platonic love. Physical love may fade and die, but the sonnets to the soul are eternal. Corinne, then represents a composite of these nationalist and Neo-platonic impulses. In rejecting Oswald in favor of platonic love, she returns to its source in the ideal forms created by the poets and artists of Italy. Her literary character was inspired by actual female improvisers performing as members of Arcadia in Italy. Diane Long Hoeveler notes that when Corinne performs the tarantella folk dance, she invokes the spirit of Italian nationalism by transferring her emotions to the spectator through her ritualized steps.⁴⁰

Salon culture in Italy was enhanced by association called Arcadia which promoted the membership of women and the revival of classical antiquity. Arcadia was a unique intellectual movement founded in Rome in 1690 to promote classical antiquity, satellites were established throughout Italy and it immediately attracted women members, though they remained outnumbered relative to men. Women who joined include de Stael and Corilla Olympica, the poet laureate in 1776, upon whom de Stael is believed to have based the ceremony of her character, Corinne's crowning at the capitol. Scenes like this suggest that Petrarch's and Socrates' concepts of platonic love informed the spectacles that promoted a feminine element. The eternal feminine then in the guise of platonic love played a crucial role in disseminating the concept of patriotism during a time of national crisis. Patriots could identify with the hopes of the nation, but also the expression of idealism through centuries of culture. Women were at the center of Italian salon culture like their European counterparts. However, Italian salons included a cross-current of European influences as Europeans flocked to Italy to participate in the Grand Tour and study of Classical Antiquity.⁴¹

Foscolo's invocation of the eternal feminine recalls the relationship between the poet Dante and his beloved Beatrice. Conjuring up her image from the ashes of hell in *Of Tombs* causes the heavenly gates of St. Peter's to materialize before him. Her presence becomes a chimera of female deities that coalesce to form the concept of the divine from the depths of hell: "I pray the Muses help me call up heroes."⁴² She is the creative nationalist force that conjures the male divine at a time of national crisis. It is the same spirit that causes the Greeks to defeat the Trojans, but withheld their victory from Ulysses on his journey of exile and not home. Foscolo credits the female nymph whose union with Jove produced the fifty sons of Priam, the king of Troy, for producing the Roman Julian line. The Muses "makes the deserts glad with song/ and overcome the silence of a thousand centuries."⁴³ The tomb then becomes a receptacle for the soul and the ashes from which the soul is called forth to assume new more fantastic forms for future generations of patriots who protect its sacred soil. The Risorgimento, or resurrection of future patriots would find its ultimate fulfillment in the unification of Italy in 1870.



Figure 1. Francois Xavier Fabre. *The Vision of Saul*. 1803.
Musée Fabre. Montpellier, France.



Figure 2. Antonio Canova. *Tomb of Vittorio Alfieri*; (1808).
Santa Croce, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 3 Francois Xavier Fabre. Portrait of the Countess of Albany.
Louise Stolberg. 1793. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

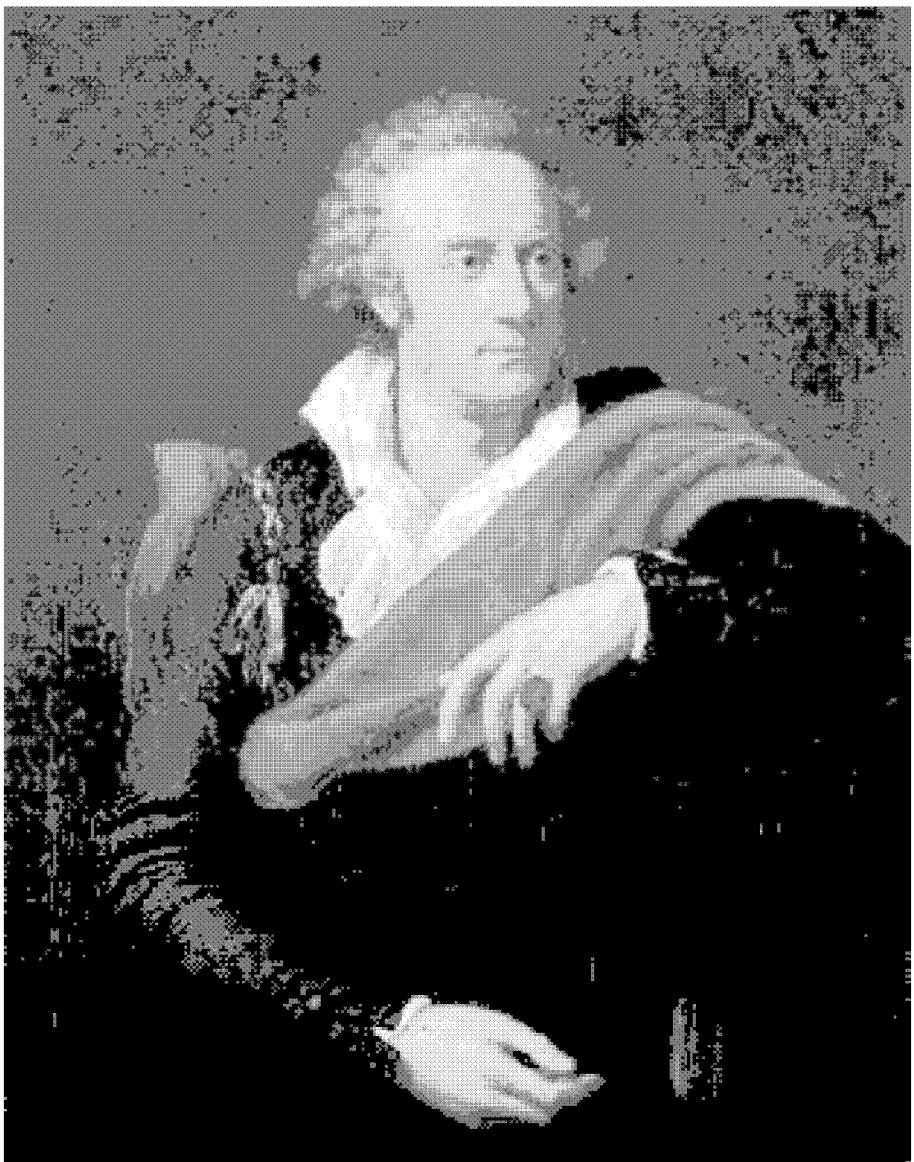


Fig. 4. Francois Xavier Fabre. Portrait of Vittorio Alfieri. 1793.

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Written Worlds, Visual Worlds

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Art's long history has evolved with the evolution and cross-fertilizing effects of diverse cultures over the centuries. The realization of works that depict or realize inventively the visual world are analogous to the way writers construct fictions. One should understand that fictions are largely a reconstruction based on experience in the real world. As extrapolations, pictorial art can involve descriptive phrasing or, as was the case with the Surrealists re-contextualizing images and fragments, even object product elements and these pictorial or visual devices become a comment on the transformation of our ways of envisioning the world we live in. When we look at a Magritte painting that may include elements that for all intents and purposes look real, but are in fact construction, we are experiencing a form of visuality in art that is comparable to the magic realism of authors like Borges. The long history of art often follows a trajectory that parallels that of the state of economy and of industry. If we consider Turner's Romantic landscapes they occur at a point when the landscape was in transformation under early industrialization and hence the pull of imagery was all the more popular for a public seeking assurance in a world of change.

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan has had a lot to say on the word versus image segregation in contemporary culture. And he understood the significance of the way the public reads a confusion of signals and symbols in new media culture. As McLuhan has commented, "The neat packaging job of perspective and pictorial space filled with familiar objects has become irrelevant to human problems of experience." For McLuhan space no longer involves perspective in the traditional sense, but instead is a "sensorial" where a range of effects including those of sound, speech, the visual environment all compete together, and thus have changed our vision of art as a window for contemplation or configuration of a narrative. McLuhan believed auditory space has changed our reading and experience of visual space. As he says, "Our visual experience is now a mosaic of items assembled from every part of the globe. Moment by moment. Lineal perspective and pictorial organization cannot cope with this situation." For McLuhan, later in life audience was the cause of any work of art, including fiction or pictorial interpretation.¹

The sculptor and artist Moholy-Nagy's book *Vision in Motion* already identified with the fluid state of visuality in an environment when he wrote stating the "true artist

is the grindstone for the sense" he sharpens eyes, mind and feeling; he interprets ideas and concepts through his own media. Everything is relational, for Moholy-Nagy, just as for McLuhan rhetoric becomes the language for interpreting an age of relational technologies that transform our reading of space and the visual world, whether printed or painted.² In his book *Through the Vanishing Point*, McLuhan identifies the illumination of verbal space through the visual to be a central tenet of the poetical interpretative vision. This is something seen in William Blake and equally Rene Magritte. Avant-garde aesthetics often became preoccupied with this synaesthetic dimension of transference of labels and meanings. The verbal medium is so completely environmental as to escape all perceptual study in terms of its plastic values.³

Cezanne believed the painter takes hold of a fragment of nature and "makes it entirely painting. Likewise Georges Braque write that a painting does not seek to reconstitute an anecdote but rather to constitute a pictorial event."⁴ And so the artwork exists in a world of its own, in fact as a fictive world, completely segregated from its sources in experience. And so there is a refusal of the source of the object or image within the painter's conception and process. As such art is no longer a container or inventory of real world physical objectifications. The painting is neither a subjectification of real world experience but exists as its own reification of the artist's vision.

And yet the real world and separate artwork exist within continuum of expectation that is quite similar when we arrive in the sphere of a new technology world where cause and effect are cellular, removed from the physical context of life, and of the world we live in. The narrative or visual pictorial construction thus, becomes something else when the audience' expectation and sensation is no longer based in a physical, material world but instead is referential and informational. Images - pictorial or written - are given value or weight according to the volume, and the delivery, and yet there is no reflection or contemplation associated with this visual universe being presented. And so the confusion becomes one where imagery, fluidity are confused with the world of the artist that assumes and accepts a cosmos, a continuum of experience based on association both verbal spoken and visual sensory. The reduction of a fluid language of experience is something Jerry Mander has expressed in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*: "In separating images from their source, thereby deleting their aura, television, photography and film remove the image from their context of time and place."⁵ This removal of context likewise exists in the world of art, where images with no conceptual, pictorial or visual location or locus are accepted as being works of art. And so from television's removal of context, we now have a tele-visual and hyper-spatial world that exists in parallel with the experiential environments we live in, depend upon our sustenance and well-being. And so pictorialism, and the fictional initiatives are replaced by a collaging, a layering, and decontextualized re-combination of images as if in a story but their constitution is less reflective, less contained by consciousness. Indeed the pictorial and fictional is now a form of animation that relies on an absence of experiential and contextual framing. This identifies the art of our era, its lack of framing, and its uncontained unedited capacity to distract its audience, who are the people bring a value and definition to what is called art.

Visiting Jaipur recently, I met the artist Vinay Sharma whose grandfather was an astrologer with great understanding of cosmology, as was his father. Sharma engages with history by integrating visuals and texts from the past into paper pulp that then becomes the beginning for his artwork. While there I became aware that Sharma plays with notions of calligraphy and “writing” as an abstract language. The “content” of his writing is non-existent, and in fact these are visual devices within a composition. I was struck by the visuality of his idealized calligraphy, and written forms that are nevertheless not writing at all in some cases. Juxtaposed next to antique texts within a single work of art they appear to awaken a sense of the origins of art, and of writing and their close relation to each other. The written images nevertheless have a weight and significance that we read visually. Here we see that the common ground between writing and painting reaches far back into time. Ancient maps, methods of recording numbers, and symbols all were integrated into writing and were visual as well hence the common ground between the visual and the written. These forms are nevertheless detached from reality, a separate world that holds within it great visual spiritual and cognitive. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his book *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* has made us aware that in artistic tradition associated with sacred Hindu and Christian art, mediaeval Christian and Hindu art was treated as a linguistic endeavor, much as Sharma treats the written, or appearance of writing and codified visual forms (fictional and pictorial) in his painting. And here we return to the origins of the recorded image itself, even the phonemes that relate to sound, where the written and the pictorial are in effect inseparable. We see this in many ancient forms of art, that exist in lines, as multi-level event recordings... As Howard Nemerov comments, “the characters of iconography were dictated at least as much by the codified formulas of priesthoods as by any free observation of the physical world.”⁶

The conception of landscape in painting is a point to consider. While for the Western artist landscape was much a window whereby the world is objectified, quantified, and given symbolic weight, for the Chinese or Japanese the landscape is painted just as it is constructed in traditional gardens. The traditional Japanese garden is thus a painting in three-dimensions to be experienced as such. The reference points of a garden exist outside time, and have a reference that is inter-generational and largely conceptual. Land and performance artist Dennis Oppenheim’s *Preliminary Test for 65’ Vertical Penetration* (1970) is a work that conceived of the artist’s involvement with an aesthetic and ultimately linguistic point of perception. Oppenheim reduced the gap between the visuality of a scene and the person perceiving actually by challenging the standards of contemporary art. A photo document of this event shows Oppenheim sliding in a line down a mountain tracing a line. This is to witness an intervention into the idea of historicity, and the challenge is to modernism, the progressions that succeed each other, in terms of the mind-body affirmation that contemporary art often seeks and entraps itself in her, ultimately building its own container, its confines, its “property”. The landscape is written on by the artist’s body, a sublime comment on the objectification of the subject, in this case landscape, in art, and equally on the person doing the perceiving, the artist in this case.

The dualism inherent to Romanticism’s vision of nature, to modernism’s aesthetic program of objectification of the artwork as identifiable property follows the conventions of a historical viewpoint. Dennis Oppenheim’s *Preliminary Test for 65’ Vertical Penetration* is indeed intentional and a very visual scar on the land, and non-art as object land at that. This human scar would have been something the Romantic painters in England or the Hudson River school would actively have sought to remove in their sublime erasure of evident discontinuities in our reading of “nature”. It is an “editing” and visual effect that we use the finest video and TV advertising today. Sublimity sells product with great efficiency. That product could be a minimalist sculpture or a tract of land. As Uvedale Price commented in surveying the picturesque in the land in 1810,

“The side of a smooth hill, torn by floods, may at first very properly be called deformed, and on the same principle, though not with the same impression, as a gash on a living animal. When a rawness of such a gash in the ground is softened, and in part concealed and ornamented by the effects of time, and the progress of vegetation, deformity, by this usual process, is converted into the picturesque; and this is the case with quarries, gravel pits, etc., which at first are deformities, and which in their most picturesque state, are often considered as such by a leveling improver.”⁷

Here we see the dislocation and re-textualizing of the landscape in the early Romantic era. The landscape is not as it appears, but needs to be “converted into the picturesque”, and so we become aware of the objectification of the world, much as animals were categorized by Darwin, and plants by Paracelsus.

We are brought back to the Surrealist’s and Rene Magritte whose paintings presaged the disappearance of a conscious interpretation of the material reality, collaging and bringing together synchronous fragments of the dream experience. And yet the dreams were drawn from the repetitive, the continuity of daily life, as it was for Magritte. “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (This is not a Pipe) came to mean much more than simply the object being represented. The painting itself became a representation of what a painting potentially should be conceived of or interpreted within the public imagination. Here visuality and verbal reality meet. They exist as mutually independent signals or symbols within a painting. The painting itself represents a point of transition in contemporary evolving culture. The significance of the object or event the environment was becoming transformed by mass production, large economies of scale. What replaced it was, in Magritte’s conception, of his paintings as “material signs of freedom of thought.”⁸ And so, even if the visual and verbal cues in Magritte’s paintings cancelled out their potential rational significance. These paintings defy the pictorial and fictional worlds they describe. They are less about any potential pictorial narration than the description of various states of being. The material, even bourgeois significance of these works was that they sought to erase the composure they affect as paintings. As Magritte commented, “In both the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life, our thought does not manifest its freedom to its fullest extent. It is unceasingly threatened or involved in what happens to us. It coincides with a thousand and one things that restrict it. This coincidence is almost permanent.”⁹

Magritte's is ironically a logical, even rational approach, something that underscores the unconscious and dream logic of Surrealism, all this in a world where objects – manufactured and natural – intersect with increasing volume as industrialization further made its mark on the world in the early 20th century. And yet the long history of word and image are, as Ernst Cassirer makes clear, endlessly intertwined, the image begetting a language and the word begetting a symbolic and pictorial legacy, often interchangeable, and co-related. As Cassirer so cogently comments in *Language and Myth*, “In the course of (that) evolution, words are reduced more and more to the status of mere conceptual signs. And this process of separation and liberation is paralleled by another: art, like language is originally bound up entirely with myth. Myth, language and art begin as a concrete undivided unity, which is only gradually resolved into a triad of modes of independent spiritual activity. Consequently, the same mythic animation and hypostatization which is bestowed upon the words of human speech is originally accorded to images, to every kind of artistic representation.”¹⁰ The magic of word and of images has its origins in common ground. There is thus this interchanging of metaphors, between the visual and the written worlds. The seemingly fictive character of art and of fiction stem from similar origins, and share a language that is so similar in many ways, but the writer and the artist, from whatever generation transform our experience into a way of revealing, not only the self but the other, bringing it all together.

As myths evolved, so did language structure. Language evolved out sense of what being was or could be. Mythopoetic potential emerges from this sense of a specific moment in time, and in place. Non-Spaces of environment, as the anthropologist Marc Auge has made clear in *Non-places: an Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, are places that no one inhabits but we simply pass through daily like perpetual nomads. These non-places (shopping centre, highways, airports, and public plazas) are akin to the words and images we immerse ourselves in. The mass of moving peoples worldwide have become separated from experience or identity and become approximations that establish disorientations. Time is flattened, and the individual shares anonymity and near invisibility with millions of others. Ernst Cassirer identified the separation of *ego* from *being* in explaining the spiritual depth and power of language when he wrote, “The ‘is’ of the copula almost unfailingly goes back to a sensuously concrete original meaning; instead of conveying mere existence or a general state of being, it originally denoted a particular kind and form of appearance; especially being in a certain place, at a specific point in space.”¹¹

In contemporary art as with contemporary fiction the objecthood now ironically manifest in the use of E-readers, and screen bred imagery, digitalized and extemporized by web technology caricatures expression and creative fiction as something that supersedes any placement within a physical sphere of context which is the key to cosmology. Uwe Poerksen has gone on to make clear in her book *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language* that words themselves have no meaning, no specificity in the context of transferral and research that characterizes digital and information technologies. Words like sustainability, development, project, strategy, and problem now are universally applied regardless of context, or situation. Words are effectively

like Lego blocks – interchangeable, without reference, and capable of re-combinations. If words, like visual art now no longer exist as manifestations of a physical world, experiences are interchangeable, and a cosmological worldview is threatened.

Incoherence, a lack of focus no longer situates place with time, with an old and new paradigm. We may consider the visual worlds of an art of distraction of our era, and the corresponding written as literal places of the imagination. These places use disorientation as a language that mirrors the extemporized experience of our times. Art and fiction are part of a shock doctrine that enables further manipulation of populations as identity becomes disenfranchised. Disorientations are not fictions, and yet with new technologies the sense of what a story, of what a narrative, and a myth become equivalent of a cut and paste layered non-site. The non-site for the arts – pictorial – as text or image – is the screen. Mediatic and informational overload challenge a worldview based on permanence. The world we live in is actually a micro-context. The editing, and the shock effect of digital word and image is the accepted creative currency for our era but it need not be! Continuity, a sense of place, of the moment in time, and of everlasting wisdom, or consciousness, is at the origins of the human journey. They can be part of that journey in our times as well. Words, images, evoke worlds that extend our sense of being, always in place with space and time.

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Pleasant Symmetry

Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature

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All things tend toward their ultimate perfection.

— Dionysius

Any literature begins with a set of limitations. They can be genre, thematic, poetic or others and they usually play a double role: *a)* as restrictions laid upon the author, especially if the latter must follow an established canon, as was always the case in classical ages (both Western or Eastern), and *b)* as a generative mechanism compelling the author to invest maximum energy and gather all the forces of his or her imagination in order to show emotional diversity, the complexity of human feelings and the strength of passions, as passed through Ockham's razor of the literary rules. Since Arabic classical poetry is rich in various genres (*hijā'*, *rithā'*, *mardīyāt*, *wacf*, *zuhdiyat*,¹ etc.), each of them demands special skills and a readiness to obey its particular restrictions. This obedience, however, is not blind. For example, the author working in *hijā'*, which distantly reminds one of the European epigram, though sometimes with a more discourteous lexicon, feels free in sending curses to his poetic object, whereas he still takes great care to show his excellent grasp of the genre.

Rithā' is a geometrical construction with the inner symmetry combining the abstract and the concrete in one completed figure. It has two parts: general meditation on fate, death, the illusion of earthly existence, etc. and the panegyric addressed immediately to the dead. Since the idealized description of the latter is as a kind of poetic funeral or farewell to a good man – the man of *muruwwa*² – whose deeds will never fall into oblivion, the contemplative part of *rithā'* was never of lesser value. It could well be the subject of a separate study: whether philosophical reflections in *rithā'* gave birth to a later speculative complexity which took on many shapes in subsequent Islamic thought.

Symmetry is felt on all scales, in the literary genres as well as in living consciousness. If there are 'sad genres,' there are also 'joyful ones,' like *mardīyāt* (images of the hunt)³ performed by such authors as al-Buhturī (821-897) and al-Mutanabbī (cf. below). *lardīyāt* was a court genre *par excellence*, it didn't actually differ from its European counterpart. In the traditional *ghazal* (Rumi, Hafiz, Fuzūlī, to mention just a few), devoted to feelings of love, an idealized figure of the beloved has

much in common with the *rithā'* idealization of the dead. Darling is not a real woman, but an icon; she can be prim or easy-going, distant or close, reserved or responsive but she always resides in the poet's imagination. Paradoxically or not, the Arabic poet loves not what he sees but what he doesn't, and forgetting the women around him, he creates his own whom he will never chance to meet in real life. This though is what he actually needs. Poetic love doesn't need to be realized just as the adoration for the dead man doesn't need to be based on his real qualities. In both cases we deal only with the ritual acts which exteriorize the human feelings to the extent they are no longer personal but belong to persona.

To construct this symmetrical world and keep it secure was a primary task, not only poetic but religious. Symmetry, among other things, is completeness; whatever the natural and social conditions, changing in time for better or for worse, a poetically flawless figure seems to be the only way to survive in the constant flow of things. It can't be forgotten since a poet as a human being with limited memory finds it the most effective way to save and transfer what he ought to. A poetic figure, squeezed in symmetry, functions as a phenomenal event, the niche of memory. Consciousness of death and the comprehension of one's finitude made classical Arabic poets seek a solution; with minimal instruments in their possession they opted to rely on the phenomenal and aesthetic, i.e. the timeless, not on the physical and illusory. In this sense, ritual in Arabic literature differs, for instance, from the Vedic ritualism by the way that they have constructed their universe. If the Vedic ritual excludes time as life factor and the *rṣi* is trained to recite the same "text" with the mathematically gauged rhythm, the *shā'ir*, on the contrary, includes time in his worldview. What he needs to do is to create the eternal within the perishable, unlike the *rṣi* who creates the perishable out of the eternal.

A genuine classical poet, a literary genius, as we call him or her when such a work is completed, is often a product of this dichotomy which pushes the poet to invent something new within the untouchable old. Doing so, the author himself doesn't really make "literary history," as one might interpret this; he neither breaks it down nor revolutionizes it when his oeuvre stays individually with neither acknowledgement nor even understanding expressed either by the public or by the court where the necessity of the latter was particularly needed in medieval times when the social and financial position of the author was the direct consequence of the court's attention to his work. One can think, for example, of the Heian period (平安時代, 794 - 1185 A.D.) in Japan, of the late Pallavas in Tamilnad or of the period of the early caliphs when the poet played the role of a spiritual servant, etc. (for example, as when the emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla welcomed the philosopher peripatetic Abū Naṣr Fārābī (872-950/51) and the poet Abū at-Tayyib al-Mutanabbī (915-965) who also praised his military campaigns.

In Arabia the classical author had another role: to use his talent within the settled limitations and yet function as the keeper of ritual as expressed in words.⁴ This ritual doesn't mean a return to the archaic past, a repetition of "the same" in order to keep

the world in *status quo* (as Vedic *r̄ṣis* or Altaic shamans do), but the poetic visualization of a common sensibility. Like in the European Middle Ages, the Arabic author had no copyright because he expressed not his own thoughts and sensations but the common ones; he saw his goal as not to say something new by positioning himself as an original and creative mind but to say as clearly and elegantly as possible what everyone might think and feel. Maximum innovation can be done in form (*lafz*) but not in sense (*ma' nā*)⁵; the latter remains untouched as the object of mental ritual.⁶ From this point of view, early Arabic literature doesn't know authorship but *inter-authorship* which, however, doesn't mean the total absence of individuality but rather a hierarchy of individual voices each expressing poetic ideality. Every author was (and, supposedly, felt himself) a contributor to the common treasure of ideas, he belonged to a sort of spiritual tribe charged with the task of keeping and transferring the fragile feeling of the perfect. The well-known phrase of the pre-Islamic poet 'Antar ('Antarah ibn Shaddād, 525-628) about what one poet bequeaths to another betrays the spirit of poetic heritage: one who comes later is supposed to improve that with which he has been left.

Three elements compose this perfectness: *lafz*, *ma' nā*, and *beit*. Since medieval Arabic poetry has a strong preference for clear-cut, semantically complete rhythmic segments, every *beit* (بيت) stands as a micro-universe conveying an image, i.e. a message. Structurally speaking, any hemistich of *beit* conveys one *ma' nā* which can be developed in the second hemistich.⁷ *Beit* is to the Arab consciousness what *haiku* (俳句) is to the Japanese one,⁸ it makes both the mind see and time go. This attitude to *beit* comes from the pre-Islamic epoch when the completed rhythmic segments had magic meaning. Many poets were the masters of this universe hence, perhaps, the sense of their own exclusivity and self-righteousness. Poets use *beit* in order to create the most beautiful images that they can, like al-Mutanabbi, who likes to play with the contrasts and symmetry when one hemistich of the *beit*, containing 2, 3 or 4 feet (between 16 to 32 syllables), is visually opposed to the second:

iżā anta akramta-l-karīma malaktahu
wa in anta akramta-l-la'īma tamarradā⁹

Such antinomies are countless but each of them conveys a particular idea then imprinted on the common mind. Not only for the sake of aesthetic reason, but also for a social one, contrast as a poetic tool worked its way out to the summit of Arabic poetry. It had, as we said, a magical dimension: if the world is always balancing between the good and the evil, the victory of one or the other depends on a man's thoughts and deeds. On his words as well; this is why locutions should be as clear and illustrative as possible, word as sharp as a sword.

Besides, comparison (*tashbih*) and metaphor (*isti'āra*) play a most important role in classical Arabic literature since they present a shortcut to the sense to be conveyed. The poetic space of *beit* is so limited that any means helping to economize it, including ones such as *tajnīs*,¹⁰ are of imperishable value. Thus it seems natural when an Arabic poet uses unheard comparisons: the beloved's hair as a bunch of

grapes, and striking metaphors – the times of joyfulness go away like the lover with the stolen kiss – since his ultimate goal is to keep the world in its ritualistic state, to make distant things meet in a poetically built symmetry.

Let me now propose a hypothesis: the symmetrical (or dual) structure of the *beit*, especially in Bedouin poetry, is indeed a verbal form of the proto-Semitic 'symmetrical' consciousness manifested, in particular, in the worship of ancestral spirits, as in the Upper and Lower Egyptian kingdoms. As an example one can take the Dual Shrines (*iterty*) in Ancient Egypt where the royal ancestors were kept; these objects were built, as H. Frankfort says, of "light and ubiquitous materials, they could be easily taken down and rebuilt wherever they were required."¹¹ If the *beit* is such a verbal shrine, which is rebuilding by the poet at any necessary moment, then it transmits to us the most profound mental construction of the Semitic world. Moreover, if the *beit* is a far but direct heir of the ancestral practice of worshiping, one can have no doubts concerning its ritualistic nature, even unseen under the wrap of poetic images.

It would be certainly naive to think that even such basic feelings as love, hate, jealousy, fear of death or quest for happiness have not changed through different times and, being all-human, are similar (similarly displayed) in world literature. Romantic love in Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) differs significantly from, say, love in Murasaki Shikibu's (紫式部) *The Tale of Genji* (XI century) or from Sei Shōnagon's (清少納言) *Pillow Book* not by the standards of the lovers' behavior or by verisimilitude in description or by the fact that Novalis writes as a man and Lady Murasaki as a woman, but first and foremost by the content of the concept itself. For Novalis, as for the German romantics as a whole, love is an enviable disease which often ends in death. To love means to die in the abyss of this feeling never reaching its bottom. Endless love is a secular version of the scholastic concept of infinity based both on the Aristotelian metaphysics and on the Hebrew idea of God. In medieval Japan, however, described at best in Lady Murasaki's novel, love is a message sent by a lover to his or her object. Romantic sufferings are unknown to the medieval Japanese lovers not due to the superficiality of their feelings nor to the lack of true passions, but due to their having no idea of such emotional gravity as crushes everyone who gets grasped by its force. Love as disease is a European ritual supporting the whole body of such literature at least from the Romantic period onwards. In the Heian period love conveys the idea of illusion; it can be of course true and passionate but remains as much a will-o'-the-wisp as one's worldly existence. Japan thus presents another kind of ritual in which any ontology is whittled away and the goal to attain supremacy over the world and death loving someone is just irrelevant. German, Japanese or Arabic, as we shall see further, this ritual governs the author's consciousness of the classical age formatting the latter within the dichotomy between canonical restrictions and imaginary freedom.

In classical Arabic poetry, which received its start in the works of al-Mutanabbi, then pushed to its summit by Abū al-Ma'arrī (973-1058), Ibn Hajjaj (941-1001), and Abu Firās al-Hamdānī (932-968) among other names, love and affections had much in common

with Troubadour poetry which created a series of poetic icons (or clichés) used by Troubadours as play cards in their poems. When al-Ma'arrī depicts a beautiful Bedouin lady whose gaze makes every man tremble, he creates a narrative icon situated exclusively in the narrator's imagination:

Oh, if thou, the cloud, love Zainab, cry then and we will do <...> In my most hidden dreams I give you countless kisses without being afraid of the consequences of what has never been.¹²

Like *la Dame* in the Troubadour's poetry or love in Bernart de Ventadour's poems, Zainab is not actually a living being, a "corporeal woman" but an ideal manifesting an iconic love of the poet for his own creature. Indeed, it was more than just the idealization of a life character whose presence could daunt a sensitive soul. When al-Ma'arrī, or anyone else of his caliber, creates such an icon, he performs a ritual helping him to protect the object of adoration, and his own feelings, from ineluctable death. To love the icon is safer than loving a living woman whose beauty will one day vanish. She avidly protects her cheeks from kisses, but the earth will have them in its possession anyway.¹³

Often love poems in Arabic classics neighbor funeral elegy (*rithā'*) in tone and in poetic feature. However, funeral elegies, like the one that al-Ma'arrī composed in memoriam of his mother, turn out to be more individualistic since they portray the particular event and must display the sorrow caused by it.

My mother went ahead of me to the grave. It is horrendous that she had gone away before me. What is left to me is to mourn her disappearance with the words gashing from my mouth <...> She had gone when I reached the mature age, but it still seems to me that I am a newborn took away from the breast.¹⁴

Individualism in *rithā'* is almost always embedded in the folkloric frame, and the form of narration presents, in fact, a network of traditional images from Ancient Arabia and Bedouin life that can be traced back to pre-Islamic times (*al-jāhilīya*). This network is so dense that almost every poetic figure in funeral elegy refers to and thus actualizes its ancient proto-type.¹⁵ So, inscribing the death of his mother into a larger narrative and telling us the story about the dove mourning her brother, al-Ma'arrī alludes to the pre-Islamic poetess al-Hansā' (d. around 644); when the poet speaks of the lion with eyes like two flames sheltering in two rocks, in two cups of wine, al-Ma'arrī once again returns to *al-jāhilīya*. His spiritual teacher al-Mutanabbī, after falling in disgrace in Sayf al-Dawla, often in his dreams returns to the lost paradise of Bedouin culture when everything was righteous.

If poetry is a remedy from time, the poet (*shā'ir*) is a φαρμακός, a medium and a carrier of the sacred knowledge; he is a keeper of ritualistic time. The poetic network of images is mediated through his very position, and even the most wealthy and powerful caliphs need his service in order to enter eternity. Such was the conviction of al-Mutanabbī who shared many Bedouin beliefs concerning the poetic gift. "Al-Mutanabbī" is a pen-name, it is the active participle of the verb *tanabbā* (or *tanabba'* a

- "to tell the future, to act as a prophet"), the fifth form derived from the noun *nabīy* (from Aramaic *nb̄yā*, Hebrew *nāb̄i*) meaning "prophet;" the name may also signify "tall man" (from the verb *nabā* - "to be tall, rise up").

Al-Mutanabbī was a complex figure. His early years passed in the Bedouin milieu of Yemen the influence of which in the form of poetic nostalgia is felt almost everywhere in his poems. His favorite poets were Abū Tammām and al-Buhturī,¹⁶ both belonging to the South Arabian tribe of *tayy* (طَيْ);¹⁷ when al-Mutanabbī was killed he had in his bag the dīwāns of these two poets with his marginal notes. He was ambitious and arrogant, he had political views that once cost him years in prison and nearly his life;¹⁸ a traveler and a beggar, a wealthy man and an escapist.

Al-Mutanabbī's early poetry is far from being in any variety of styles. The most illustrative example is, perhaps, a *rithā'* written on the death of al-Husayn ibn Ishāq al-Tanūkhī that presents a coherent structure and sets up the canon for this genre developed in the Arabic funeral elegy during the Xth century. It starts with a general meditation on the illusory values of human existence:

In truth, I know as any wise man that life I protect so cautiously is nothing but false seduction. I see how every man cherish the hope wandering indeed toward nothingness¹⁹.

It may be interesting to note that similarly gloomy motives fill up a woman's diary in medieval Japan known under her pen-name Michitsuna no Haha (右大将道綱母), Al-Mutanabbī's contemporary, whose lonely reflections on the illusion of all human matters echo the Arabic poet. She, however, belonged to the high class of Japanese society and had no need to seek powerful protectors but the feeling of loneliness and the vanity of everything hovers over every line of the diary. Her writing is also a kind of funeral elegy on the world around her since it has no recourse to become true and real, truth and reality are to be imagined. The one she loves is away and waiting is the *modus vivendi* of her life. So years pass, and only her own imagination, helping to realize the veritable nature of existence, its ineffable but omnipresent nothingness, brings her some emotional release.

Something ended with the death of al-Tanūkhī and the author of *rithā'* makes us feel it:

Until you were buried in the grave I didn't realize that stars can vanish from the sky falling upon earth.²⁰

The deceased was a brave man and his earthly existence gives an example of such proud behavior as every man should seek. Whatever the enemies' effrontery, whatever the wealthy men's thoughts, the brave warrior enters eternal peace. The *beit* says:

what they feel in their palaces will be never better than what he does in the grave; he is protected by the angels Munkar and Nakir.²¹

Knowing the character of the poet, it seems that he takes advantage of the tragic event to disparage the rulers showing them to be as dwarfs before the giant. This

rithā' is also a political message sent to those whom al-Mutanabbī considers inept at administration. The dissociated Arabic empire is governed by yesterday's slaves, people of low origin, by the non-Arabs who have neither the capacity nor the right to occupy their positions. The poet dreams of an ideal governor, a caliph, capable to reunite the Arabs into a powerful State based on the spirituality of Islam.

The greatness of the peoples lies in their governors. The Arabs will not prosper until they are ruled by the strangers who have neither education, nor nobility or conscience.²²

Not just politically, but existentially as well the poet despises his contemporaries for their cowardliness, persnickety conduct, and lack of righteousness. Save for few exceptions, the contemporaries provoke in al-Mutanabbī nothing but pity:

Having huge bodies, the people of our time are skin-deep; although I live among them, I am not of their type. Well, the gold is obtained from the cinders.²³

Let's stress this point: the ideal Islamic state for the poet doesn't mean the caliphate, at least as he saw it in those days. According to his Qarmatian views, the caliphs violated the innate Arabic sense of social justice by their thirst for power, by their wish for wealth, etc. He dreams of a ruler as ascetic, as prophet and as *shā'ir* demanding no personal profit, governing the present looking at the perpetual. A ruler who supports the balance between the natural and the social, a ruler of the ritual.

The poet once found such a ruler in the emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla with whom Al-Mutanabbī spent nine fruitful years (948-956) of his life resulting in the *Sayfiyat*. Although the relationships between the emir and the poet were not always cloudless, due to the court constant intrigues, his respect, if not adoration for the ruler, seemed to be sincere. He himself vehemently denied any flattery or hypocrisy in his panegyrics pointing to the fact that such an outstanding emir deserves only his verses.

Even the blind man sees my talents as a poet
And even the deaf will hear my poems.²⁴

His life-long nostalgia for the lost paradise, for '*umrān badawī*',²⁵ as ibn Khaldūn will put it later, may explain some of al-Mutanabbī's poetic choices in composing *urjūza*, poems in the *rajaz* meter, the most archaic and basic of Arabic poetry which stemmed from rhymed prose (*saj'*).²⁶ In his panegyric to Abū 'Alī al-Aurājī, written in *kāmil* meter, the poet widely uses these 'obsolete' forms²⁷ in order to amend the contemporary reality and its state of consciousness. He was also a master of *tardiyāt* known in Arabic literature since the pre-Islamic epoch where poets, working with the *madḥa* theme (the hero meets the lion), described (*wacf*)²⁸ the animal without ever seeing him.

Poetic consciousness is often, if not always, turned to the past. The Baghdadi author Muhammad ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī (970-1016) who, after the death of his father, became *naqīb al-ashrāf* (chief of the '*Aliyads*) was a devoted shī'ite with a perfect grasp of *rithā'* in which he expresses his deepest despair in the contemporary world:

We are like splinters bouncing here and there in the torrential flow
Bringing its waters between the hills and sandy desert.²⁹

The past is seen through an idealizing gaze owing to which it becomes more real than the present. The Islamic author feels the necessity and duty to rebuild the past at any suitable moment and with any *beit* so to keep it alive and, in so doing, opposing themselves to the reality around them. The past is fiction and the ultimate reality at once. When al-Raḍī's mother passed away, he expressed his disdain for his weakness as a human, selfish being. Death, which took his mother, will never compel her son to live without her in the present, his mother will never leave him because she is kept in poetic form. The only thing capable of giving a sense (*ma'nā*) to the loss of what one loves the most is that this loss is nothing but an actual sensation, an experience of *hic et nunc* whatever painful it may be. However, this actual is fallacious namely because it is of time: it comes to be and then goes away, and, without being immortalized by poetic means, it goes away forever. Thus imagination is more powerful than death if it is put to use in the right way, i.e. to create a perfect balance between sense and form.

To be sure, such was the feeling of the classical age. Al-Ma'arrī, perhaps the most complex and eclectic literary figure of the time, shows the same attitude to these existential themes. When the Ḥanafi theologian Abū Ḥamza died, al-Ma'arrī used this sad occasion to launch his metaphysical contemplations: "Death is sleep, a rest for body, life is insomnia."³⁰ This *rithā'*, among others, will be the grounds for his later metaphysical lyrics called *Luzūmīyāt* (Worthless Necessity) in which his special literary method, that of displaying inner subjectivity, was fully developed. Symmetry reaches its apogee when almost every *beit* in *Luzūmīyāt* becomes like the pile with two opposite poles: if death is sleep, then life is insomnia; one who mourns his ancestors is the same as the one who mourns his descendants; one who dies at a mature age doesn't differ from someone who dies in the cradle, and so it goes.

Al-Ma'arrī's symmetrical poetics turns out to be both perfect and fearful since it leaves one with the optimistic idea that the world, protected by God, can't change essentially and evil is nothing but a temporary and removable phenomenon. Whatever happens to a man after his death, the individual existence of the human being is ontologically tragic: it little matters where he is and what he does in his life. In many aspects al-Ma'arrī shares the Buddhist treatment of one's life as permanent suffering with no way out, even faith is not a solution since it can do nothing to turn human existence for the better. Every man is squeezed between the moment of birth and the moment of death, and he must cover this distance at any cost. Birth means death, existence means vanishing, individuality is just a haphazard form of suffering. Apparently, in the XIth century, when the world beyond mattered more than the actual one, this all-too human and personalized sensation was revolutionary, if not heretic.

We can speculate why such a perfect poet as al-Ma'arrī came to this 'Buddhist' vision of the world? Why did it happen at the time when Arabic poetics had reached its most splendid shape? Whether it was an outcome of the completed symmetry, of the Islamic atomism or of any other cause is a starting point for further studies. Important

is that al-Ma‘arrī converts his tragic worldview into prose thus making another revolutionary move in medieval literature. In his two works *Epistle of Angels* (*Risālat al-malā’ika*) and *Epistle of Forgiveness* (*Risālat al-ghufrān*) the author presents a social satire on the existing order of things. The formal topic of the first *Epistle* concerns grammatical questions, in particular the declination of some angels’ names. Al-Ma‘arrī begins with compliments acknowledging his correspondent’s scholastic erudition but takes it too seriously to evoke a comic effect in the reader. Knowledge of the classical Arabic should give access to paradise, as certain grammarians wish to hope, however what they know is only lifeless grammatical categories, not the richness of vivid language. These grammarians live on rules and never on language; being afraid of making a mistake (*ita’*), these wonks are incapable of grasping the essence of a word behind its purely grammatical form.

If *Epistle of Angels* is a critique of the rigid mind and of the void soul closed in its own often ridiculous self-assuredness, *Epistle of Forgiveness* is an ironic explication of al-Ma‘arrī’s skeptical ideas concerning the heavenly (after-death) life. Written as a reply to Ibn al-Qārih, a then renowned panegyrist (*sheikh*, ironically), in which al-Ma‘arrī criticizes in a more or less implicit way the unabashed style and conduct of his colleague. The author’s main thesis consists in denying the possibility of entering heaven just by using his panegyric talents even if it brings him glory and comfort on earth. For al-Ma‘arrī the court panegyrist is a corrupted figure who has sold his talent for social dividends. His example is a vivid illustration of how ‘Abbāsid society makes use of the literary mind in pursuit of its self-glorification. Like many other caliphates, appeared at the al-Ma‘arrī epoch, the ‘Abbāsids used religion as a ground for their political regime based, as it seemed, in a spiritual sovereignty. The political context, however, was complex. The Fātimid, another powerful dynasty, denied the ‘Abbāsid government in Baghdad as having the right to rule over Aleppo and Egypt, justifying it by their direct descendency from Muḥammad’s daughter. In Baghdad the political power had been focused in the Shi‘i Buwayhid clan,³¹ i.e. Persian (*Daylam*)³² militaries.

Ibn al-Qārih’s greatest desire is to enter the paradise whose description he knows from the Qur’ān. It so happens that when al-Ma‘arrī places the panegyrist in his dream, he embellishes it with unprecedented comfort, like the grove with fabulous trees, as if he were ‘Allāh’s special guest. The comic portrayal of the Qur’anic paradise was an unheard literary move at that time, it stands unique in classical Arabic prose marking simultaneously a significant shift in the Arab narrative consciousness that will never be the same again. Al-Ma‘arrī creates a new concept of fiction that puts into doubt the canonical reality if not the sacred one. Such a bold innovation, one may think even of sacrilege, was possible owing to the symmetry elaborated in poetry: the author’s imagination turns out to be equal to reality lying both in and out of the perceived world. In *Epistle of Forgiveness* the serious and the comic compose one “narrative pile” charged with fine observations of Arabic language, history, religious tenets, etc. The plot of the epistle is auxiliary and the reader’s attention is directed towards all these subtleties so that the very text serves as a guide to Islamic culture as

a whole. Another important aspect of al-Ma‘arrī’s work is that it paved the way for literary individuality. Still residing within medieval inter-authorship, unlike its Japanese counterpart Michitsuna no Haha, this individuality reveals itself by creating unexpected contexts. When al-Ma‘arrī leads his reader through the gallery of overwhelming philological peculiarities, he construes such fictional loci as allow him to mask or allegorize his heretical ideas. If Michitsuna’s mother expresses in the diary her deepest thoughts and doubts, the Arabic author lets the reader guess what the true message might have been.

Such allegories will later be rampant in European literature and art, especially in the Renaissance period when the Italian artists will hide their pagan protagonists in Christian forms, but al-Ma‘arrī uses allegories in order to propose an alternative vision, to compel his reader to see with his own eyes. So, paradise is nothing but a reflection of the social order where one receives what he has never got on earth. In the pastures of Heaven al-Qārih behaves himself in exactly the same way as he did in the ‘Abbāsids: his character, habits, self-righteousness, love for luxury remain unchanged; he enjoys the same pleasures and strives for the same goals. Al-Qārih’s adventure in paradise reminds one of many European medieval journeys to heaven during which the traveller meets different individuals whom he knew or didn’t know on earth. The aim of such a trip is usually educational because on his return the traveller changes his previous point of view and tells the truth to those who still have doubts about the afterworld. Al-Qārih encounters notorious personalities with whom he conducts long discussions on poetic art, Arabic meter (*arūd*), language, and literary genres. Everything looks realistic except some idealized modifications common to the paradisiacal life; for instance, when Al-Qārih meets five horsemen with beautiful eyes he discovers that all of them in their earthly existence were one-eyed poets forced to compose poems for living.

Al-Ma‘arrī constructs his paradise in the way the poet constructs the *beit*, i.e. according to the principle of symmetry. Two worlds are two hemistiches, and what occurs in the first one will be continued in the second in a somewhat “upgraded” manner; these worlds are linked one with another not in space and time but in the author’s imagination for which the completeness of the universe is of primary importance. At his meeting with the houris, al-Qārih asks an angel to explain to him one passage in the Qur’ān: “Verily, we have made them perfect. And made them virgins, darlings of equal age (with their spouses) for the fellows of the right” (56: 34-36). The angel says that ‘Allāh made the houris of two kinds <sic!>: ones for oblation to the right, the others he made beautiful maidens because of their pietist conduct during their earthly life. When our hero sees one of the them and finds her too skinny for his taste, the houri immediately becomes plump and rounded. Heaven gives the man what he lacked in his physical existence introducing him into the noumenal dimension where he can see known things from a different perspective. This is, indeed, the role of fiction to supply the human mind with allegorical visions, to extend one’s horizon until it should have a whole image of a thing. It is worthless trying to understand the Qur’anic

sententiae at the literal level, they need a finer, more figurative reading (*mutashābihāt*)³³ helping to form a coherent picture of the two connecting worlds.

If the paradise is a fiction, a product of the author's fantasy having no literal meaning, as al-Ma'arrī shows us, then fiction is the only paradise where one can come to terms with social injustice and one's own sufferings.

Poetic influence had been felt in classical Arabic prose since the earliest essays. Abū Bakr al-Khwarizmī (934-993), issued from a modest Iranian family, was a writer who composed his fiction in rather poetic form. His rhythmic prose (*saj'*) is construed from short segments geometrically modeled after the *beit* structure. He uses oppositions and, like al-Ma'arrī, often plays with unexpected lexical combinations in order to deliver a comic effect. Al-Khwarizmī describes his misadventures during one of his journeys when he was obliged to ride a donkey in the company of a stupid donkeyman.³⁴ Hilāl as-Ṣābi' (925-994), born into a famous Sabian family, was a high ranking official under the Büyid whose history he was asked to write. Unlike many freelance writers, al-Ṣābi' chiefly wrote official documentation (letters and orders) in which he gives a vivid picture of the 'Abbāsid state in the period of its decline. He doesn't criticize it in the way of al-Ma'arrī, but rather testifies to his times as objectively as possible. The sensitive personality of al-Ṣābi', equipped with his literary talent, allowed him to depict with lucid style not only significant events but also the mood of his epoch. His narrative is often embellished with lyrics showing from within the tastes of high 'Abbāsid society, much like Murasaki Shikibu, the author of *Genji Monogatari* and a lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court, who gave us an exhaustive picture of Heian mores.

Although al-Ṣābi' is not a novelist and, like Lady Murasaki, he didn't create *dramatis personæ*, nevertheless the Büyid official is definitely a representative voice of his society filtered through his administrative fiction. He uses *saja'* as a poet does, so his prose sounds poetic. The 'Abbāsid literary mind nicely combines or, to put it better, doesn't differentiate the poetic and the prosaic usage of stylistic tools when the aim is to convey the meaning of the seen. Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (922-1023), an essayist and one of the most brilliant minds of the time, wrote about al-Ṣābi' that "his prose has all the qualities of poetry and his poetry has all the qualities of prose."³⁵

We can certainly trust this laconic description since al-Tawhīdī himself, whose works show his knowledge and strong interest in gnostic philosophy,³⁶ was a man of the *adab* literature, Arabic belles-lettres. In his work *Enjoyment and Conviviality (Al-imta' wa-al-mu'anasa)*, composed in the form of Platonic dialogues with the Büyid vizir and high official Ibn Sa'dān, al-Tawhīdī encroaches upon a great number of themes such as Arab language, grammar, Greek logic, philosophy, morals, etc. His friendship with Ibn Sa'adān, he was one of his *nudamā'* (cup companions), permitted al-Tawhīdī to give to the vizir the role of Socrates. It doesn't seem to be a flattering hypocrisy but a thoughtful technique to place the wise statesman in the center of the narrative.

It is common in the *adab* literature to combine deep contemplations with easy lyrics and personal stories often serving as the illustrations to these contemplations.

The author himself claims no expertise in any field conveying only the sense of what was said and what he has heard from the notorious personalities. The author is fictional, his characters – Ibn Sa'dān, al-Sijistānī, Ibn Miskawayh, and some others – are real. Al-Tawhīdī tells the stories: for example, about the riots in Baghdad when in 972 the Byzantine army approached the city. The vizir asks the story-teller:

What do you know about the riots (*fitna*) that were so disastrous and played such a big role?

These events, I am going to tell you, I know from one spectator and participant who found himself in the thick of action, like the drowned, but later managed to survive.³⁷

The *adab* narrative is not deprived of medieval *exempla* well known from European literature. As John Bromyard, a late-medieval Dominican friar, once said: it doesn't matter whether one or another *exemplum* is true, what matters is its meaning.³⁸ The *exemplum* shows at a most basic level the link between abstract metaphysical concepts, such as good and evil, sin and redemption, penance, etc., unclear to illiterate hearers wishing nevertheless to understand the principles they are asked to obey. In the *exemplum* as well as in the *adab* two worlds – the divine and the human – are glued in a Möbius strip. All living beings move in one direction; when a man dies on earth, he begins to live in heaven.

Good and evil are clearly distinguished and articulated in the *adab* text where the author has no qualms about showing his attitude to one or another. In this attitude to these oppositions the author often demonstrates a psychological judgment revealing his fictional persona. Al-Tawhīdī sneers at superbitry and weakness, also at ignorance and excessive egoism peculiar to many of his literary fellows. In his book, unlike the majority of the literati of the epoch, he points to the equality between poetry and prose by putting much stress on the fact that ideas, expressed in poetic or prosaic writing, are much more important than their form. Fiction is art and magic (*sīḥr*), as said in the Qur'an, and the writer's goal is to reach a purity of speech, *balaghā* (بلغ) that will help him to enter the reader's heart.

In the 'Abbāsid period one, if not the most popular, form of the short narrative becomes *khabar*,³⁹ having the same symmetrical structure, *khabar* is *beit* in prose. It is a minimalist narrative composed of *sanad*,⁴⁰ a chain (*silsila*) of the narrators transmitting the story, and *matn*,⁴¹ the transmitted story. Apparently, the origin of the *khabar* genre goes back to the *hadīths* (Arabic plural: *hādīth*), the Prophet's deeds and sayings to be memorized by his followers until they have taken on the written form. The *hadīths* have been transmitted by the chain of people presenting the authoritative lineage in a way that nobody could doubt the authenticity of the transmitted words. *Silsila* will later be the dominating principle in many esoteric traditions such as Sufism where hidden knowledge will be transmitted through successive lineal masters to their disciples or the Terma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (especially Nyingma school) where the inner teachings, known as the tantras of the long transmission of the canon, are transferred in the same way. Abū Muḥammad ibn

Qutaybah (828-889), an ‘Abbāsid philologist and a master of *hadīths*, composed a rich collection of short prose in his book *Kitāb aṣuyūn al-akhbār* (*The Book of Choice Narratives*) that became a standard handbook of Arabic belles-lettres.

The beginning of the *khabar* mentions the name of the transmitter: “Abū Muḥammad al-Qurashī told us; he said...”, “in his *History* Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Hamdānī said...”, “the old master told me; he said...” and so on.

Once upon a time two men accused of theft were fetched to Ibn al-Nasawī who identified the thief by his arrogant behavior and aplomb, the qualities that have helped him to steal. Another story was told by al-Qurashī: one man gave money to his pal and after some time asked him to give it back. The pal refused. Both men went to Iyās Ibn Mu’āwiya who asked the complainant whether he had any witness. He said: “no.” Then Iyās Ibn Mu’āwiya asked about the place where it occurred. The complainant replied it was a tree; Ibn Mu’āwiya told him then to go to this tree and check if God left any sign there, meanwhile the accused had to wait for his return. As soon as he went, Ibn Mu’āwiya asked the accused in passing if he remembered that tree. After the latter described the tree to him, Ibn Mu’āwiya exclaimed: “Enemy of God! You are the traitor.” Another *khabar*, transmitted by al-Muhasin al-Tanūkhī, tells us a classic story about the man who badly treated his servants and was finally punished by the caliph.

The symmetry of the *khabar* is clearly seen in its plot as always containing a “challenge and response” development; there is either a riddle to solve or a bad deed to punish. By and large, justice is always restored in this narrative since, as the Ḥanbālī theologian Ibn Taymiyyah points out in his seminal work *Al-aqīdah al-wāsiṭīyyah*, it is the balance that ‘Allāh had imposed for his creatures and established for fulfilling rights. When matters pertaining to this life are grounded on justice, then it will remain on the right course, even if the person who established this justice doesn’t have any share in the hereafter (cf. also Qur’ān: 4: 135; 5: 8). Besides, the *khabar* literature demonstrates another aspect of the phenomenon of *inter-authorship*: the actual narrator dissolves into his reference, however without him the text (*matn*) might have never been transmitted.

At about the same time the *maqām*⁴² literature begins to spread out over Arabia. In the ancient (*jāhiliya*) epoch the term had the semantics of “dramatic state or situation” in which the poet finds himself most often. Later it seems to have signified “battle or struggle;” for example, in Abū Tammām’s poems the word means “war scene,” “theater of war” where the warriors show their braveness. This heroic meaning has been kept in Bedouin poetry and at one point migrated to Islamic culture with a modified semantics as attested by Abū Ibn Qutayba (828-889) in his work *Maqāmāt al-zuhhād ‘ind al-khulafā’ wal-mulūk* where the *maqām* appears as a rhetorical form, more exactly as a righteous speech. It is certain that at the dawn of Islam the meaning and the function of the *maqām* were close to the European *exemplum*: it signified the protreptic usually given by an ascetic (*zāhid*) in the caliph’s or a high official’s presence. Similarly, the story teller (*qāṣṣ*) has appeared in the mosque with the same protreptic or with his improvisations on the lives of prophets or saints in which he has revealed the vices of

society and the illusory values of earthly existence. More precisely, the word *qāṣṣ* (فَاصَّ) in Arabic means “fictionist,” the person who narrates, especially a character who recounts the events of a novel or a poem.

Beginning from the Xth century the *maqām* means a story with such a fictionist, and in a larger sense the concept stands for any picaresque novel. Like in its European counterpart, in the *maqām* narrative a trickster or a vagabond (*‘ayyār*) is the eloquent speaker who pronounces his rhythmic prose (*saj’*) and declaims poems in the classical language. The appearance of these characters on the literary scene was not a haphazard event. Urban culture, especially in Iraq and Iran, turns at the time to such novellino-like characters presenting another dimension of Islamic official culture. In other words, being articulated by a trickster, the popular and high registers were glued together in, so to say, one cultural totality corresponding to the very spirit of Islam. Interestingly, in Europe such a collection of short narratives by an anonymous author titled *Il novellino* appears in Italy in the epoch of *Duecento* (precisely, the last decade of the XIIIth century).⁴³ One of the novellas narrates the story of Francesco d’Accorso, a notorious lawyer who worked in Oxford and then returned to Italy. In England he was an adviser to Eduard I and apparently gained much respect from the king. We know also that he undertook some diplomatic missions on the king’s behalf: in 1278 the lawyer delivers a harangue, actually an allegorical sermon, before Pope Nicolas III (1 Kings, Israel) asking Samuel— who is a metaphor for the Pope – to give him a king, a new archbishop of Canterbury to occupy the vacancy. Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, which was certainly written not without the indirect influence of al-Ma’arrī, places Francesco d’Accorso in Hell among sodomites (*Inferno* XV, 110).

As the *‘ayyārs* began to throng the Iraqi and Iranian cities, they more and more began to enter literature. Although the geographer Muḥammad al-Muqaddasī (945-991) in his book *Al-ṣan al-taqāsim fi ma‘rifat al-aqālīm* (*The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions*) describes them as beggars and the people deprived of a sense of law and morality,⁴⁴ it was not always the case. For some authors, like the Ismaili poet Nācir Khusraw, they are rather strong and smart men often clad in dervish cloths; according to the Sufi \\$amdūn al-Qaccār, their relations are based on ethics; the writer Abū al-Jāḥẓ informs us that the *‘ayyārs* are gathered in confederations and choose their own *qādī* whose role is to solve inside problems. In the era of the Safavid dynasty, which developed out of the Sāfavīyyah Sufi order, the *‘ayyārs* become a legend; balancing between the heroic and the comic, like the notorious Mehtar Nesīm and ‘Amr ibn Umayya, they are the “gluing figures” of two cultural registers.

Whatever the truth, stories about the *‘ayyārs* laid the ground for *maqām* literature and for Arabic fiction conceptualized in these ambivalent characters. In classical Greek literature such ambivalence, if in fact it ever existed, only in mythology; Europe will come to know it (except some Latin authors) only in the Renaissance, especially in Italy and Spain, when *novela picaresca* portrays the *pícaro* having the same typological traits as the Arabic *‘ayyār* and like the latter the *pícaro* is a phenomenon of urban culture mirroring the vices of the official power. In Spain the first picaresque

novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554)⁴⁵ was published by an anonymous author and was later included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. It tells the story of a boy, Lazarillo (an allusion to Lazarus of Bethany⁴⁶), born in Salamanca, who in his struggle with poverty becomes a *pícaro*. An Arabic influence is felt already at the outset of the novel since the mother of Lazarillo, after the death of her husband, lives with the Moor-groom Saïd who takes care of his new family. Later on, when Saïd was caught and severely punished for pilfering, Lazarillo's misadventures begin.

In *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*,⁴⁷ composed by the poet, scholar and the fine stylist Muhammad al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122), we read about a certain Abū Zayd who, before he died, gives a lesson to his son on the best occupation in the world: it is of course to be a beggar, a vagabond as the legendary royal son Sāsān (Sāsān the Kurd) whose father, the Persian ruler Bahman b. Esfandiār (according to the *adab* literature), left the kingdom to Sāsān's sister Homāi. Deprived of his inheritance, Sāsān takes to a wandering life gathering around him other beggars and vagabonds named the "sons of Sāsān." Similarly, Abū al-Mutahhar al-Azdī (d. in the first half of the XIth century) is known for his work *Hikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* where he creates a vagabond persona Abū al-Qāsim who absorbed all the main features of this popular image. Abū al-Qāsim lives in Baghdad and the stories give a vivid picture of the town sometimes with precise details concerning the relationship between official and popular culture. Once upon a time, attending a meeting of the wealthy righteous citizens, the hero begins to read from the Qur'ān in an ostentatiously serious manner provoking smiles in some of them. Watching their reaction, Abū al-Qāsim goes berserk wondering what is so funny and, after being asked to go on, he instantly changes his attitude (as if he was acting in a Nō play) and starts telling dirty jokes and anecdotes scolding his listeners.

This in fact is the most important, metaphysical feature of the vagabond figure: to be able to change his point of view on purpose and to let see the same things from the opposite perspective. Before *maqām* literature such ambiguity was unknown. To be sure, its appearance in the Arab fiction of the epoch modified significantly not only literary perception in general but also the basic concepts of the medieval mind which was used to perceiving culture in unequivocal categories as symmetry that makes prose look like tracery.

Notes and References

1. *Zuhdiyat*, sermon-like poems, were also popular in medieval Jewish poetry. Its main focus was laid upon death and asceticism. The poet of the 'Abbāsid era Abū l-'Atāhiyya (748-825) was the chief representative of this genre, he renounced this world to the point that his contemporaries accused him of heresy.
2. One of the key concepts of traditional Arab culture is embodied in the phrase: "to have Man's high qualities" (braveness, hospitality, amiability and the like). It also fulfilled an important function in poetics since poetry in the pre-Islamic era was considered by the poets of *al-jāhiliya* as a verbal *muruwwa*. The most intriguing thing is that the *muruwwa* has been gradually adopted by Islam as religion, by politics (under the *Umayyad*) and by caliphate diplomacy. Later authors consider the *muruwwa* as benevolence. Note that the cultural significance of the concept can be compared to the Chinese (Confucian) *lǐ* (禮) and *yì* (義). For details cf. J. Goldziher, "Alte und neue Poesie im Urtheile der arabischen Kritiker," in *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 1, Leiden, 1896, 149 and passim; B. Farès, *L'Honneur chez les Arabes avant l'Islam*, Paris, 1932, 190-193; also G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba: l'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées*, Damas, 1965. Cf. M. Rihan, *The Politics and Culture of an Umayyad Tribe: Conflict and Factionalism in the Early Islamic Period*, New York, Tauris, 2014, 18 and passim; S. Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 (esp. chap. 5).
3. Cf. for more details H.A. Shehada, *Mamluks and Animals: Veterinary Medicine in Medieval Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, 116.
4. This conception of ritual poetics discusses Monroe's theory of poetic formulae which is grounded, in turn, on the folklorist research of Lord and Parry. For Monroe, as well for Parry, the formula is a group of words regularly used in the same metrical conditions to express a necessary concept. It is treated as a mnemotechnic instrument of the epic language. Using such a formula, the poet is able to "metrize" or convert his speech to a metric system. Cf. J.T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 3, Leiden, 1972; M. Parry, *Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse I: Homer and the Homeric Style*, Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, vol. 41, 1930; also A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.
5. For a detailed analysis of the concept *lafz* cf.: K. Athamina, "Lafz in Classical Poetry," in *Studies in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetics*, S. Somekh (ed.), Israel Oriental Studies XI, Brill, Leiden, 1991, 47-55; also D.E. Koulooughli & D. Koulooughli, "A propos de *lafz* et *ma'nā*," *Bulletin d'études orientales*, t. 35, Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 1983, 43-63. Arabic medieval literary criticism knew a number of "books" (*kitab*) devoted to *ma'nā* with more or less specific considerations of the concept. For a complete list of these books cf. F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Bd. II. Poesie bis CA. 430H., Leiden, 1975, 58-60.
6. The Arabic *lafz* and *ma'nā* may be compared with the Indian *sabda* and *sphoṭa* respectively where the first one is the temporal, physical manifestation of an unchanged ideal sense.
7. According to Grunbaum, who partly developed some of Massignon's ideas, *beit unambiguously reveals the atomistic viewpoint of Islamic culture*. Cf. L. Massignon, *Les méthodes de réalisation artistique des peuples de l'Islam, Opera minora*, t. 3, Beirut, 1963; G.E. Grunbaum, "The Spirit of Islam as Shown in its Literature," in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 1, 1953; cf. also A. Dayf, *Essai sur le lyrisme et la critique littéraire chez les Arabes*, Paris, Jouve et Cie, 1917; P. Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paris, Seuil, 1972.

8. *Haiku*, the term coined by the Japanese modern poet Masaoka Shiki, is structured by the *kiru* (cutting) and *kireji* (cutting word) principles when two images are juxtaposed and “cut” by a word.
9. “When you respect a noble man, you possess him, when you respect a bastard you prepare a revolutionary”; ديوان المتنبي. بيروت، 1973، 372.
10. In Arabic poetics *tajnīs* corresponds to the Greek παρονομασία (derived from the verb παρονομάω - “to transform a word,” “to play upon words which sound alike”) based on the use of phonetically close words derived from the same *l̄ish̄tiqāq*. For further details cf. O. Zwartjes, *Love Songs from al-Andalus. History, Structure & Meaning of the Kharja*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, 266 et passim.
11. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1948, 96. He also points to the great antiquity of these ritual artifacts, mentioning their names: *per-nezer* (Lower shrine) and *per-ur* (Upper shrine).
12. المغربي أبو العلاء، سقط الزند، بيروت، 1973، .226. One can notice that the name “Zainab” alludes to one of the Prophet’s daughters.
13. *Ibid.*, 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 39.
15. It can be compared with Italian Renaissance painting, in particular in Sandro Botticelli’s works, where the Christian motifs unambiguously refer to the pagan mysteries. Cf. for example E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London, Faber & Faber, 1958.
16. البعدادي عبد القادر. خزانة الادب 1-3، القاهرة، 1، .383
17. This tribe belongs to the southern or Qahtanite branch of Arab tribes originally from the Aja and Salma mountains situated in North Central Arabia. The tribe shared the area with Bani Assad and Bani Tamim, and its members included both nomads and settled town-dwellers. Cf. K. Al-Saleh, *Fabled Cities, Princes and Jinn from Arab Mythology*, Wallingford/Oxon, Eurobook, 1985.
18. Al-Mutanabbi’s activity in Latakia and among the Bedouins remains in many aspects uncertain, but his poems of this period show the dissident spirit against the ruling dynasty. He seemed to share the Qarmatian heresy, denied many of the Qur’anic precepts, including that of the *hajj*, and considered the imam not as the dynastic prerogative of the ‘Aliyad but as an investiture accessible to any muslim. Cf. for details R. Blachère, *Un poète arabe du IV siècle de l’Hégire* (Xe siècle de J.-C.): *Abou t-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi*, Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1935.
19. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، .71
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.* In Islamic eschatology these two angels, *The Denier* (منكري) and *The Denied* (نكري), control the faith of the dead.
22. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، .93
23. *Ibid.*, 100.
24. *Ibid.*, 332.
25. The word *badawī* (بدوي) is derived from the “*badw*” - “nomad, wanderer,” opposed to the verb *haḍara/ ḥadr* - “to stay, be present somewhere;” thus the main semantics of *badawī* is a nomadic way of life signifying no anchors nor attachments to a certain place. Unlike *haḍara* as a sort of urbanism, *badawī* implies a holistic psychology, a vision of the whole. Al-Mutanabbi’s personality was exactly so.
26. The Muslim philologist Abū Mancūr al-Thā‘alibī (961-1039) is known for collecting samples of the rhymed or rhythmic prose (*saj’ al-manthūr*) designed mainly for secretaries (*kuttāb*) who were expected to memorize and use them in their official correspondence. There are four unpublished manuscripts of his work: *saj’ al-manthūr*. Topkapı Ahmet III Kitāpları 2337/2; Yeni Cami 1188; Universite Arapca Yazmalar 741/1; Bayezid Umūmī 3207/1. Cf. for details B. Orfali, “The Works of Abū Mancūr al-Thā‘alibī (350-429/961-1039),” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40 (2009).
27. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، .132-130
28. This *wacf* technique will be artistically developed by al-Ṣanawbarī (897-945), another poet from Sayf al-Dawla’s circle known for his fine landscape lyrics. His poems differ from those of Mutanabbi and of Abū Firās (both are his close neighbors in poetry) by a special sensitivity toward nature. If in Mutanabbi nature is a representation of the *badawī* essence and in Abū Firās it is the silent watcher of the poet’s torments on earth, al-Ṣanawbarī, on the contrary, lets nature display all its diversity which brings him the delight of existence. One of his most illustrative poems reads: “The cup of grass feels no lack of wet out of clouds and, fed by her, the grass gets drunk and swings. The roses line up for us, gathered and dispersed everywhere. The narcissi strike the vision but not in a way that witchcraft does <...> the clouds permanently disseminate their gems, the earth gives them a smile in return, the birds get excited”; cf. الصنوبرى. ديوان. بيروت، 1960، .43-42
- Al-Ṣanawbarī was, perhaps, the most meditative poet in Sayf al-Dawla’s court. One can define his method by referring to the concept of the XVIIIth German aesthetics *Einfühlung* (Greek: μπάθεια, Eng.: “in-feeling”) or empathy. It is seductive to compare al-Ṣanawbarī with Matsuo Bashō (松尾 芭蕉, 1644-1694), a Japanese poet of the Edo period and a great master of *renku* (連句) and *haiku* (then *hokku* 発句 with a 5-7-5 mora structure). Like the Arabic poet, Bashō belonged to the elite literary circles of *Nihonbashi* where he exerted a significant influence because of his fine natural style. In spite of his literary success Bashō, being unsatisfied with the world around him, started practicing Zen meditation but even this didn’t bring him peace. Like al-Ṣanawbarī, Bashō liked to wander throughout the countryside: he traveled on the Edo Five Routes as if seeking an accidental death. During his journey to mount Fuji, then to Ueno and Kyōto, Bashō meets other poets who, admiring the master’s talent,

- ask for his teachings. Al-Šanawbarī and Matsuo Bashō were emphatic poets, the poets of *sabi* (寂), who interiorized observable, imperfect things and so created a field that “in-feels” the world as it never was before.
29. الشريف الرضي ابو الحسن. ديوان، بيروت، 1961، 162.
30. المعربي ابو العلاء. سقط الزبد. بيروت، 8، 1973.
31. Cf. for example C. Hunt, *The History of Iraq*, Greenwood Press, 2005.
32. In *Luzūmīyāt* al-Ma'arrī uses this word to denote the Persian power; cf. المعربي. لزوم ملا يلزم، بيروت، 2، 1961، 472.
33. The term also signifies “the sciences of the Qur'ān” ('Ulūm al-Qur'ān); cf. the Qur'ān (*al-Imran*: 7).
34. الخوارزمي ابو بكر. رسائل، استانبول، 1968، 103. cf. also Z. Mubārak, *La prose arabe au IV^e siècle de l'Hégire (Xe siècle)*, Paris, Librairie orientale, 1931.
35. أبو حيان التوحيدي. كتاب الإمتاع والمؤانسة، 1-3، القاهرة، 1953، 68.
36. Undoubtedly, along with Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (932-1000) and the Persian neoplatonist Ibn Miskawayh (932-1030), one of his main intellectual sources were the *Rasā'il al-Ikhwān al-Safā'* (*Epistles of the Brothers of Purity*) whose ideas became the vogue. Paradoxically, al-Tawhīdī was long neglected by the succeeding generations of writers until the Islamic geographer and encyclopedist Yāqūt al-Hamawī (1179-1229) mentioned him in his work *Mu'jam al-'Udabā'* (*Dictionary of Writers*, about 1226) as “the philosopher of literati and the literatus of philosophers.” It is interesting to note that al-Hamawī describes al-Tawhīdī by the same “symmetrical formula” as al-Tawhīdī describes al-Šābi’.
37. أبو حيان التوحيدي. كتاب الإمتاع والمؤانسة، 1-3، القاهرة، 1953، 150.
38. Cf. G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1961, 155.
39. In Arabic the term *khabar* (الخبر) has also a syntactic meaning: “predicate,” “new information.” In the nominal phrase (الجملة الاسمية) it follows the subject, *mubtada'* (المبتدأ).
40. The *sanad* (السند) means “support,” “credibility” of the transmitted texts created by the *silsila*. In Arabic classical linguistics the *sanad* means also the part of the sentence upon which another part (*musnad*) leans. It conveys pretty much the same idea as *mubtada'* and *khabar*.
41. The *matn* (المتن) signifies the visible part of a thing. In the *ḥadīths* it is the text (content) of the oral tradition.
42. The word is derived from the verb *qwm* (ق. و. م.) the initial semantics of which was to rise, to dress for accomplishing an action;” later the meaning changed until the verb began to signify an action by the passive agent: to stay, to reside in one place.” The term *maqām* appears in the Qur'ān several times as a place, a dwelling site” and also as a station in the afterworld (cf. Qur'ān, 19: 73,74).
43. G. Favati, *Il Novellino*, Bozzi, Gánes, 1970.
44. أحسن التقسيم في معرفة الأقاليم. مطبعة، بريل ليدن، 1909.
45. Full title reads: The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities (*La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*).
46. The name “Lazarillo” is a diminutive from Lazarus; in Hebrew *El'āzār* (אלעזר) means “God is my help.” The Gospel of Luke (16:19-31) narrates the story of the Beggar Lazarus and his relationship with the Rich man.
47. الحريري. مقامات، بيروت، 1958.

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Gerard Caris informs in an Aesthetic Format

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Whereas it may be said of other artists that they draw, paint or create sculptures, Gerard Caris should properly be called an investigator. More accurately, he investigates the plastic properties of the regular pentagon and the regular twelve faced complexes constructed out of pentagons: the dodecahedrons. Gerard Caris has done this for over 25 years. Thus the belief would seem justified that he must be thoroughly inquisitive and considerably obsessed¹. The question arises, though, whether in studying and interpreting this art form the focus should be on research and method or just on the outcome. After all, this art cannot but call forth the technician and puzzler in us all, even though this may not have been the artist's first intention. However that may be, Gerard Caris does not wish to be categorized as a student of applied mathematics, but as a visual artist and therefore be judged on the outcome of his work.

He has been presented as the master of the pentagon. However, pentagons rarely occur in classical constructivistic art and geometric abstraction². Perhaps then, for Gerard Caris, the pentagon has a significance other than that of an intriguing plastic element with inexhaustible formal properties. In 1968, at the beginning of his career as an artist, Gerard Caris painted abstract canvasses with titles such as *Voedster der Wording* ("Foster mother of Creation") and *Wording der Vormen* ("Birth of Forms"), followed, in 1970, by a screen print called *Creation of the pentagon*. In it we see an irregular pentagon, which seems to descend from heaven on a beam of light. This form can be seen as a regular pentagon represented in perspective. Form and title remind us irresistibly of the mysticism that has been woven, since time immemorial, around numbers and particular mathematical figures³. The pentagon is laden with profound meaning.⁴ Whether that is also the case for the work of Gerard Caris remains an open question, although the screen print about the origin of the pentagon was also brought up at later exhibitions. It would appear that Caris considers this screen print as a manifesto. Still, he denies any "secret" meanings. His pentagons are what they are and his first concern is what can be done with them from an artistic point of view.

Nevertheless, the mystic view plays a role in some observers and certainly, too, in the history of the geometrical abstract art on which Caris elaborates. To legitimize early abstract art it was necessary to put up theories against the allegation that this art

form was only concerned with meaningless ornaments and that the makers were not to be called artists but artisans, at best. The old question of "what a work of art means without recognizable representation" is still very much alive among the public at large, even though it is no longer approached with the same degree of orthodoxy. Moreover, the appreciation of connoisseurs has changed with the passing of time. The ornament has lost its bad reputation in postmodern art. It is no longer the crime it was during the heydays of modernism.⁵ Considered in this light, there is nothing left to preclude an "ornamental" approach to and appreciation of the work of Gerard Caris. In doing so, laws that can be expressed in mathematical terms are an important aid, as much for the production as for the study of his work.

Through mathematics it was possible to offer a foundation for the theoretical justification of the geometrical abstract art, if only because mathematics had been studied in connection with plastic art since Renaissance times. At that time mathematics primarily served the development of the doctrine of the central perspective. Artists like Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Leonardo and Dürer were obsessed with this interrelationship. Still, mathematics were soon left aside and replaced by an interest in literature. In his classical study on the Italian theory of art, Anthony Blunt summarized this development as follows: "So mathematics, which had been to the early Humanist artist one of the chief weapons in the scientific study of the outside world, is in the Mannerist period nearly driven out of painting. The certainty of scientific observation has given place to a conviction directly inspired by God: reason has given way to faith".⁶ This is also conveyed by the criticism which mannerist artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari put forward in his biography of Uccello. Vasari started by observing that Uccello had spent too much time and effort on the problems of perspective, otherwise he would have been: "the most captivating and imaginative painter to have lived since Giotto." Vasari spoke severely when he observed, more generally, that: "Artists who devote more attention to perspective than to figures develop a dry and angular style because of their anxiety to examine things too minutely; and, moreover, they usually end up solitary, eccentric, melancholy, and poor, as indeed did Paolo Uccello himself" In addition, he quoted the sculptor Donatello, who is reported to have told Uccello: "Ah Paolo, this perspective of yours makes you neglect what we know for what we do not know. These things are no use except for marquetry - that is the kind of work where you need shavings with spirals and circles and squares and things like that."⁷ This reproach resembles in a way the argument put up against abstract art in later days. As a matter of fact, Donatello, in some of his reliefs, showed himself to be a master in the use of perspective.

In the nineteenth and twentieth century an effort was made to introduce a broad concept of science in which reason, faith, classical science and art would be equal in standing. In many cases this led to curious mixtures: theories in which mysticism was wrapped up in scientific terms. After all, the natural sciences had achieved great, spectacular successes and an unparalleled status. In comparison, the arts were lagging far behind. The bond between science and art, which had still been there in the early days of the Renaissance, had become lost. From those days onward, only faith and

beauty were left to legitimize the arts.⁸ This did not in any way preclude that scientists could very much be inspired by art, and that, vice versa, knowledgeable artists sought inspiration in science.

In the interpretation of the work of Gerard Caris the merging of science, pseudo-science and art still plays a role. This can be inferred, among other things, from the extensive article written by Johan Vanbergen for the catalogue of Caris's exhibition in Ludwigshafen (1991). Vanbergen appears to take up the nineteenth century point of view that the degree of truth in art must be estimated as high as that of the sciences. In both cases it would be a matter of *Wirklichkeitsbewältigung* (coming to grips with reality), a pretty term which is rather too vague and which offers little grip when, for example, we are dealing with the work of Gerard Caris.⁹

The criteria at the end of the twentieth century by which geometrical abstract art must be measured - after a history of 90 years - were developed during that history by taking this art form as a starting point. If one does not wish to resort to pseudo-scientific explanations and interpretations there is the psychology of perception to turn to, and the artistic precedents such as the doctrine of the ornament. The art historian Ernst Gombrich wrote a study on illusionistic representation, called *Art and Illusion*, next to a study on the ornament, under the title *The Sense of Order, A study in the psychology of decorative art*. If we do not recognize a representation, what do we see? Arrangements, the answer must be. What this comes down to in connection with Caris has been sufficiently clarified by Frans Boselie in his article *De Dodecaëder, Volmaakt veelzijdig voegzaam lichaam* (The Dodecahedron, Perfectly multilaterally adaptable body).¹⁰ An aesthetically attractive object cannot be void of form on the one hand, nor can it be too predictable, and thus boring, on the other hand. In other words, the image must be both complex and structured in an orderly manner, in order to captivate our attention and continue to do so. What is important is to find the right contrast between simplicity and complexity. Boselie explains that in this respect there is something wrong with the form of the regular pentagon. This form is aesthetically inferior to the equilateral triangle, the square and the circle. Those are fundamental forms "because they epitomize three irreducible forms of simplicity. They each meet the requirement that they define a plane with a minimum of unequal elements, i.e. with a maximum of "formedness." The pentagon is more complex and offers possibilities of visually creating other equality forms than those of equilateral triangle, cube or circle. This is more difficult and gives rise to intermediary forms. Those can in turn strengthen the impression of simplicity, even though the pentagon will remain less strong a form, visually, than either square or triangle. This explains why the pentagon was not popular in older geometric art and indicates at the same time how it could pose a challenge to later artists like Gerard Caris. Actually, the regular dodecahedron offers better visual possibilities than the pentagon. It has thus been subject to extensive experimenting.

After World War II a new aesthetics arose which created a framework for judging geometrical abstract art. The so-called *Informationsästhetik* (information aesthetics) of Max Bense, AA Moles and others was carefully studied at the Hochschule für Gestaltung

(academy of art and design) in *Ulm*, the successor of the Bauhaus, as much as in many other progressive academies in Europe and the United States. That is to say, for as long as artists and students could keep concentrated on the difficult lessons it taught. According to the objective doctrine, which attempted to achieve measurable results, any image must contain a mixture of known and unknown elements, which can be determined with precision, in order to be both informative and captivating. Information aesthetics can best be applied to art which makes use of elementary forms. This is self-evident. After all, lyrical splashes of paint are much harder to catch in formulae. It is probably no coincidence that Gerard Caris started his career right in the late sixties, when the cool approach was catching on and the new theoretical framework took form.

In the drawings of the *Eutactic Star Series*, which were created since 1995, Caris plays sublimely with our "sense of order", our sensitivity for recognizing patterns and enjoying unexpected blendings, and with the suggestive blurring between plane and depth. On top of that, this series demonstrates a strong sense of rhythm.¹¹ The drawings, in black and coloured ink and crayon, have been made with utmost care. This care in craftsmanship adds something to the work that is so conceptual in origin. The production of works in series, too, gives rise to added aesthetic value, because various solutions can be presented to the ordering eye of the observer. It starts off simply enough with compositions of hatched hexagons which can be seen (but not obviously so) as images of cubes. The rather robust hatching works as an obtrusive pattern which opposes the three dimensional effect (fig.). In later variations strange black and white intermediary forms appear, which start to form patterns of their own and sometimes seem to engage in battle with the pattern of the "cubes" (fig.). Still later, some planes become grey and green patterns appear behind the two other patterns (fig.). In short, our eyes and brains are constantly occupied and we are confronted with aesthetic choices. The series' title has been composed of *eu* and *taxis*, of the Greek words for "good" and "order". It is a fitting title, not just for this series, in which regular pentagons and stars are intimately entangled without totally relinquishing their independence, but also for the work of Gerard Caris as a whole. His simplicity has become more complex and that means aesthetic gain.

Notes and References

- 1 Cf. *Gerard Caris en de Vijfhoek* (Engl.: Gerard Caris and the Pentagon), by Frederik van der Blij and Wouter Kotte, 005., Utrecht (Museum Hedendaagse Kunst - Museum of Contemporary Art) 1987 (published in Dutch and German).
- 2 Cf. e.g. The second, enlarged edition of Willy Rotzler's well illustrated survey *Constructive Concepts, A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present*, Zurich, 1988 (1977). For the manifestoes, cf. *The Tradition of Constructivism*. Edited and with an introduction by Stephen Bann. London, 1974.
- 3 "It was not until I started to work exclusively according to abstract principles, which caused the dependence on life to disappear, that a world came into being in which I found peace of mind, a world, which acted as a kind of liberation," Gerard Caris wrote in the

catalogue to his solo-exhibition in the Culturele Centrum in Venlo (NL), 1972. The start was instinctive.

- 4 A great variety of literature can be found on mathematics and mysticism. Much of relevance can be found in the catalogue *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985*, an exhibition held in Los Angeles (County Museum of Art) and The Hague (Gemeentemuseum), 1986 - 1987. In theosophy, the number five and the pentagram are emblematic for the microcosmos. The direction of the pentagon, with one tip pointing downward or upward, determines the symbolic significance attached to it.
- 5 Cf. Adolf Loos: *Ornament und Verbrechen*, Wien 1908
- 6 Sir Anthony Blunt: *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450 -1600*. London, 1964 (1940), p.145.
- 7 Cited in Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, A selection translated by George Bull, Hannondsworth, 1965 (Penguin Classics), pp. 95-96.
- 8 "The basic notion that the five 'major arts' constitute an area all by themselves, clearly separated by common characteristics from crafts, the sciences and other human activities, has been taken for granted by most writers on aesthetics from Kant to the present day," Paul O. Kristeller wrote in his famous article *The Modern System of the Arts*, reprinted in the collection *Renaissance Thought II, Papers on Humanism and the Arts*, New York, 1965.
- 9 Johan Vanbergen: *Gerard Caris of De meetbare oneindigheid* (Gerard Caris or Measurable Infinity), in the catalogue under the same title, Ludwigshafen am Rhein (Wilhelm-HackMuseum), 1991 (German, Dutch and English versions).
- 10 In *Gerard Caris en de Vijfhoek* (Gerard Caris and the Pentagon), note 1.
- 11 Cf. *Gerard Caris*, SMA Cahiers 8, published on the occasion of his exhibition in the Prentenkabinet of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, 1997. Text (Dutch and English) by Jurrie Poot and Uli Bohnen.

Art Critic, Art Historian and Architect

The Pentature of Gerard Caris

BRAM DE GROOT

The birth of the pentagon

From 1970 the work of Gerard Caris has been dominated by the regular pentagon. In that year, Caris produced a silk-screen print which shows a kind of lightning bolt which leaves behind a scorch mark in the form of a pentagon (figure 1). He named this work *The birth of the Pentagon*. His mission was born there and then. The pentagon, which apparently arose as a *creatio ex nihilo*, became the theme of his artistic drive. The work of Gerard Caris thus finds its place in the long tradition of Dutch artists who, in the course of their creational process, have based themselves upon fundamental geometric forms in one way or another. With the regular pentagon as *Leitmotiv* for his creations, Caris takes up a special position within this tradition. In the company of the *perfect circle*, the triangle and the square, the pentagon is the odd man out. It is a *difficult figure*, as one will notice the moment one tries to draw a regular pentagon roughly by hand. In the case of a regular triangle or square this will not pose any serious problems, but it will turn out to be a lot more difficult to draw a regular pentagon without special aids. Besides, it will appear impossible to fill a plane with regular pentagons alone, whereas with regular triangles, squares or hexagons this is easy to do.

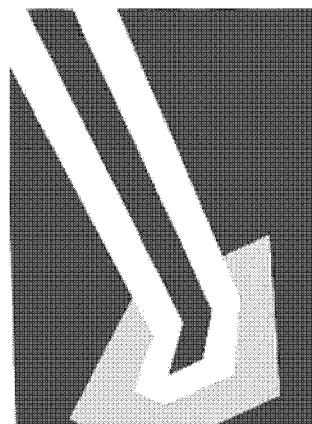


Figure 1. G.Caris, The birth of the pentagon (1970)

In the course of time, the dodecahedron, the regular polyhedron built up out of twelve pentagons, became a second subject of Caris' research. This, too, is a difficult figure, which does not comply with the laws of regular space filling and crystallography. The dodecahedron is one of the five Platonic bodies (regular polyhedrons, cf. figure 2). This structure takes up a special position among the regular polyhedrons. The four other Platonic bodies are all constructed from triangles or squares and were associated with the four elements in antiquity: fire, air, water and earth. Contrary to this, and going back to times immemorial, the dodecahedron symbolizes the cosmos as a whole.

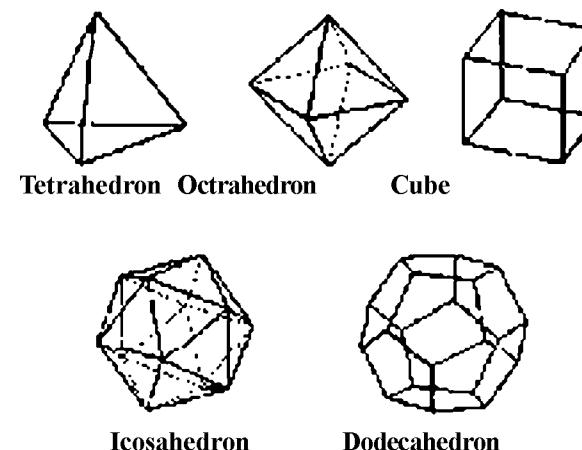


Figure 2. The Platonic bodies



Lithography by Otto van Tussenbroek (1882 - 1957) for the cover of *De Architect* (The Architect; 1905). The dodecahedron here symbolizes the cosmos.

Triangulature, quadrature, ... pentature

For centuries artists have used designing systems to design or proportion their works of art. Often, these systems are not superimposed upon the design until afterwards and they serve to add order, harmony and the right proportions in the design. There are systems based on a grid of triangles, commonly called triangulature; there is also a system based on squares and circles, the so-called quadrature (figure 3). These designing systems have been used since antiquity; from the end of the nineteenth century onwards they became the vogue again among a group of innovative Dutch artists, commonly referred to as the *Negentigers* (“artists of the nineties”). They aspired to new forms of art and based themselves on what they called the fundamental geometric principles of art.

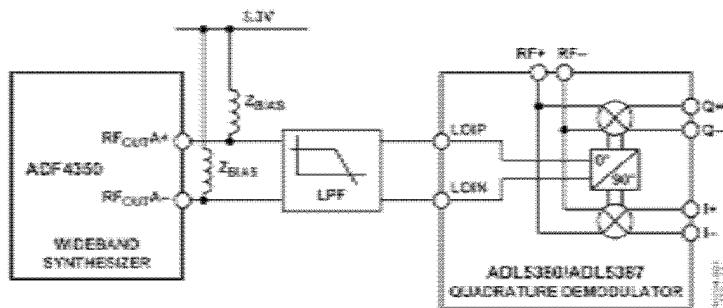


Figure 3 The basic figure of the quadrature

Caris goes one step further than his colleagues of the nineties: he does not merely found his work on geometry, his art is geometry, in essence. Geometry for him is not an aid to structure and order reality; he completely detaches himself from reality and defines the fundamental geometric principles themselves as art. “It was not until I started working solely according to abstract principles, thereby ending my dependence on real life, that a universe arose in which I found peace, a world which I experienced as a kind of liberation.”¹ With each of his works Caris shows a detail of an infinite universe under the sign of fivefold symmetry. The work of the “Negentigers” marks the beginning of a movement towards abstraction, which appears to have found its ultimate goal in geometrically abstract art. This tradition encompasses the work of Caris. In that sense the *pentature* of Gerard Caris forms a logical sequel to triangulature and quadrature.

But in a different respect, too, the work of Caris is a logical next step from triangulature and quadrature, namely in the very choice of the pentagon. Caris himself justified this choice once, saying: “I felt that quadratic or rectangular shapes had long enough been around.”² That would seem to be a rather simplistic explanation, but one that fits the time in which it was put forward. In order to understand this it is necessary to direct our view to science, which unquestionably forms a cardinal ingredient of the work of Caris. Consciously or subconsciously, Gerard Caris has always moved in the twilight zone between art and science. In his work, he is constantly searching for the

order and structure which conceal themselves behind reality and turns to science for answers. In his own words he put it like this: “I wanted art, but needed science to arrive at a creative language.”³ To Caris, research equals the creation of art. In the course of his searching he produces works of art, in which geometry is the language in which he expresses himself.

Relativity and systems thinking

“We have, in our minds, a tendency to accept symmetry as some kind of perfection. In fact it is like the old idea of the Greeks that circles were perfect, and it was rather horrible to believe that the planetary orbits were not circles, but only nearly circles. The difference between being a circle and being nearly a circle is not a small difference, it is a fundamental change so far as the mind is concerned. There is a sign of perfection and symmetry in a circle that is not there the moment the circle is slightly off – that is the end of it – it is no longer symmetrical. Then the question is why it is only *nearly* a circle – that is a much more difficult question ... So our problem is to explain where symmetry comes from. Why is nature so nearly symmetrical? No one has any idea why.”⁴

This quotation from physicist Richard P. Feynman (1918-1988) illustrates the turnaround in scientific perceptions at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was discovered that nature did not comply with our idea of perfection, and slowly but surely we grew to realise that this *deviation*, however inexplicable, is conditional for its very existence. In order to understand this shift in perceptions better we need to go back to the nineteenth century. At the start of that epoch Europe was dominated by a strongly optimistic spirit. Confidence in the future was abundant, and likewise in *progress* - however it was conceived – and there was a rock solid conviction that the powerful growth of technology and science would render mankind better and happier. As a consequence, an upswing of rationalism and individualism could be seen, as an expression of trust in personal competence and independent thinking. There was a fairly wide-spread belief that it would not be long before an *all-encompassing theory* would be uncovered. By the end of the nineteenth century, and the start of the twentieth, a number of developments occurred which undermined this world view and which lead to a fundamental shift in scientific thinking.

In 1905, Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) published a number of articles which put the world as it had so far been known – or better: conceived – upside down.⁵ Where time and space had hitherto formed a fixed and unchangeable framework encompassing all and everything these concepts themselves turned into the subject of scrutiny. Time and space turned out not to be infinite and flat, as had been assumed up to then, but came to be seen as intimately entwined. Whether two events take place before or after each other, turned out to depend of the position and speed of the observer. Objectivity was an illusion and everything suddenly became relative.

Another important scientific development was the rise of systems thinking. Scientists had been wrestling for very long with questions like: “What is the organizing principle behind an organism consisting of millions of cells, like the human being?” It

was discovered that an organism must be seen as a system, an integrated entity of which the defining characteristics stem from the specific relationships between the parts, resulting in self-organization. A system cannot be understood by dissecting the whole into its parts, the whole being more than the sum of the parts. Systems therefore can only be understood in their context. The tendency to form structures which consist of multiple layers or levels, or systems which in their turn again consist of systems is a property of all life. Each of those systems forms a whole or unity in relation to its constituent parts and is part of a greater unity at the same time. Thus, cells form tissues, tissues combine into organs, organs make up organisms and organisms together form social systems and ecosystems. The whole world consists of systems, embedded in systems, *ad infinitum*. Linear, Euclidean mathematics soon proved to be insufficient to describe such a self-regulating and self-organizing network pattern. A new type of mathematics was discovered, non-linear in nature, which was given the name complexity mathematics. This new scientific language is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, deals with relations and patterns, cannot often give exact predictions and is characterized by iteration, a process in which an equation will constantly process itself by auto-feedback. Complexity maths laid the foundation for a development which, decades later, was to result in fractal geometry.

Chaos theory

The most important scientific discovery of the past century has possibly been that reality is too complex to be fully grasped by scientists. The rational approach to nature, arisen in the age of Enlightenment, was based on linearity, periodicity and progress. It presupposed that nature is purposive, centripetal, and thus finite. This perception of nature was undermined by Einstein's discoveries and was to crumble even further during the twentieth century. It became increasingly clear that reality is infinitely complex. Nature turns out to be regulated by non-linearity, non-periodicity and auto-feedback. Nature is centrifugal and every observation resembles a cut-out from an ever changing continuum without beginning or end. These discoveries became known as chaos theory, but that is in fact a confusing title. Firstly so, because chaos theory is not a uniform theory. Secondly, because the term chaos implies lack of order, and arbitrariness, whereas the truth is that seemingly irregular, unstable processes in nature turn out to be governed by rules, too. But by their complexity these processes contain and generate so much *information* that their outcome may definitely be unpredictable, but not at all arbitrary. Nature is a self-organizing, dynamic process, in which feedback of information forms an infinite web of auto-identical branchings and concentrations. Without a doubt, there is structure to this web, but the overwhelming amount of information makes it impossible to make predictions about next stages of the process. The smallest fluctuations and turbulences may ultimately decide how processes develop.

A new reality

Because of these developments it became urgent that a reassessment of the concept of reality would take place. After all, if reality is infinitely complex and our perception can only - and by necessity - reveal a limited part of this complexity, then

the assumption of an objective reality is impossible. The distinction between reality and illusion will fade and multiple realities may simultaneously exist alongside each other. Naturally, these developments did not leave art unmoved. To an important degree, the multitude of artistic movements and trends in the twentieth century echoes the search for a new world view. The rise of abstract art, the abandonment of reality – which had proved to be an illusionary reality – the abandonment of *the dependence on life* as Caris called it⁶, was ultimately an inevitable step.

With *his* pentagon Caris, in all consciousness, renounces the geometrical forms which determined our image of the perfection of nature for centuries. For a long time, the triangle, the square and the circle responded to our feeling for symmetry and beauty and thus modelled the deterministic world view of mankind. But the discovery that *the structure* of life is not static, but dynamic instead, and that its continuation is determined by movement and change and not by rigid (natural) laws and ever unchangeable patterns forced us to look for different models. In this respect, Caris is a child of his age, he started this quest on his own initiative nothing but the regular pentagon as his tool. His work reflects a new vision of reality. He creates structures with regularity in them, but without repetition, as cut-outs from an ever changing continuum without beginning or end. In his work one is constantly surprised by the simultaneity of transparency and complexity. Caris does not create after nature, but just as nature; while scrutinizing his work one is struck by a combination of beauty and inevitable regularity. One recognizes order, but does not understand it.

The universe of Gerard Caris

For over thirty years now Caris has been creating his own universe, a universe in which he has shown an endless variety of possibilities within the rigid restrictions of fivefold symmetry. This universe has gradually evolved and was mapped in its historical development by Caris himself. After the discovery of the pentagon, his first spatial works soon followed in the shape of Polyhedral net structures (figure 4), thanks to which Caris discovered local fivefold symmetry. Years later, this finding was to become of sudden interest with the discovery of the so-called quasi-crystal⁷. With his pentagrids Caris creates a two-dimensional pentagonal universe. By extending the lines of a pentagram and the enveloping pentagon in all directions a grid of lines arises, resembling squared paper, but with varying distances between parallel lines and without straight angles. In his Structure study 5 of 1973. Caris shows the wealth of forms he is able to produce on the basis of this grid and with the aid of a just few colours.

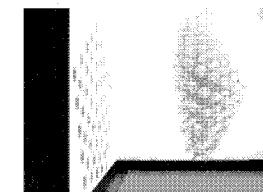


Figure 4 Gerard Caris, Polyhedral net Structure 3, 1973

More than twenty years later Caris still used his pentagrids to make his Pentagon complexes (figure 8) and Eutactic star series. The pentagrid, in effect, is a designing system comparable to triangulation and quadrature; Caris, however, does not use it to portray reality, but to show the infinite wealth of forms enclosed in the system itself. In his work PC 24 (figure 5) one can see how the rhombic centre of the pentagrid is brought to life by the colouring of each element in either white or black. An enormously rich variety of forms results. Every time the observer looks at this work he will find new details; never will he get the feeling that he has seen all, let alone understood all that he is seeing. Caris here shows that the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Looking closely one can see how five white or black triangles together form a pentagon, but also that the same small triangles, with nine others of their kind, form a pentagon of greater size, of which the smaller pentagon is a part. What we see here is the emergence of structures which form a unity in relation to their parts, but which in turn are part of a greater unity, a process which can be repeated *ad infinitum* and would seem to be a visual image of the fundamental ideas in systems thinking described above. At the same time a comparison with fractal geometry – the mathematical language of systems theory - forces itself on the viewer. Fractals¹ are the graphic rendition of complex mathematical formulae and are characterized by auto-similarity, meaning that their form is built up out of smaller versions of itself, a process which can be carried out up to infinity in both directions (reduction and amplification). In Pentagrid of 1994 (figure 9) such a fractal can be found. The centre of a pentagram is a pentagon. By connecting all angles of this pentagon by straight lines a new pentagram is created, of which the centre again forms a pentagon; this process can be repeated endlessly in both directions.

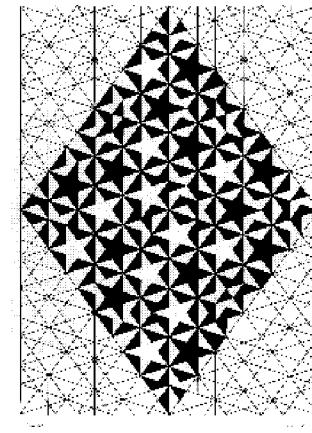


Figure 5 gerard Caris, PC 24, 1995.

In the Structure C series Caris succeeds in creating a suggestion of depth by his use of colours, which already seems to point forward to his next works, his configurations of polyhedrons and his reliefs (figures 6 and 7). These three-dimensional works are less mysterious than the Pentagon complexes, in the sense that their structure is a lot clearer. But in his reliefs Caris does show ever new and surprising patterns by using colour and the incidence of light.

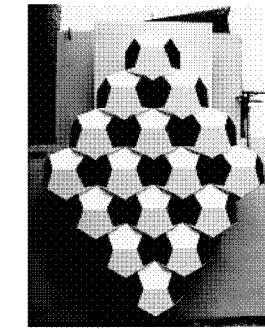


Figure 6 Gerard Caris, Relief structure 1S-1, 1993

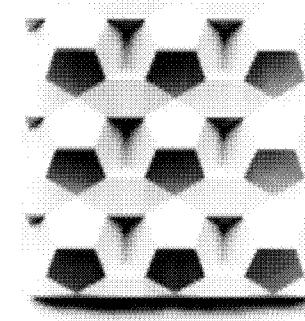


Figure 7 Gerard Caris, Relief structure 1T-1, 1993
Building with polyhedrons

At the end of the seventies and early eighties Caris sought out ways to express his pentagonal form language in design and architecture. What strikes at once is that Caris forces his form language onto his designs directly and without concessions. Whether it concerns a house, a teapot, a doorknob, a lamp or a chair (figure 8), the form of his subjects is completely determined by the pentagon or the dodecahedron. Triangulation and quadrature were used as aids in the designing and proportioning process. The basic forms of these systems could generally not be found again in the final design. Caris' pentature is not an aid, but a basic form defining principle.

In the mid-1980s Caisis returned to abstraction, leading to a complete new chapter of form occupying from the mid-1980s. To understand how these figures fit in the narrative universe of Caisis it is necessary to explore the concept of *livelock symmetry*.

Livelock symmetry

Caisis has always said that he does not create after nature, but just as nature.¹ In 1984 it was confirmed that nature, too, uses hexagons and dodecahedra. In rapidly cooling all of aluminum and manganese a crystalline structure with livelock symmetry was clearly formed. A number of planes of the crystal were regular hexagons. This discovery defined all the laws of crystallinity which dictated that crystalline grids must be periodic; it is always possible to find a repeating unit in the grid, called the unit cell. Livelock symmetry was simply found in crystallinity. The opposite of crystal was therefore learned easily. It turned out that the structure of Caisis had created in his Polymethyl met structures in the early 1980s (figure 6). "Science and art are of the same nature when it comes to sharing knowledge".² Caisis once stated in an interview and this was confirmed in 1984. Caisis realizes that no entity living can be removed out of circulation, but that there are other ways which may lead to knowledge.

The livelock symmetry in the glass-crystal and the polymethyl met structures by Caisis can be compared to the livelock symmetry in the so-called Penrose batonets. The difference is that the Penrose batons are two-dimensional and the glass-crystals are three-dimensional. Penrose batons (figures 10 and 11) are plane tilting batons, constructed mostly from two hexagons with ends sides put different angles, i.e. a sharp angle of 32°, a 144° and an obtuse one of 108° by 72°. The special feature of these batons is that they fill the plane without showing regularity, i.e. they produce a filled plane without a self-repeating pattern. In fact, Penrose batons appear to consist of repeating units in a cell. They are might call quasi-periodic.

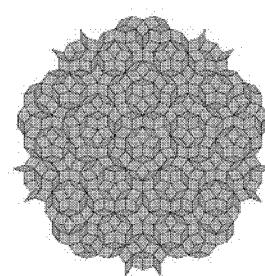


Figure 10 Penrose batons

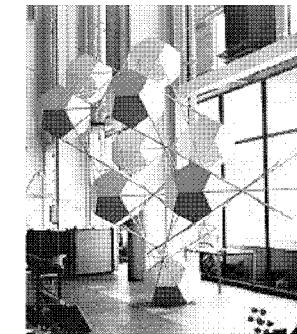


Figure 8 Gerhard Caisis, Chair, 1988

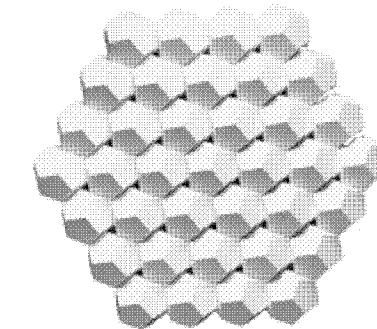


Figure 9 Gerhard Caisis, E house scale model, 1983

The reason why Caisis started to innovative himself with design and architecture is in his desire to give an impulse to a mentality change, hoping that it might lead to a change in society. The fact that modern design and architecture were largely determined by right angles, positions and vertices, often gives only the basis of efficiency and economic motives, to Caisis was like a thorn in his flesh. According to him, the influence of the living environment on the perception and possibility of people was not sufficiently taken into account. With his design of Model D and Model E houses (figure 9) Caisis tried to turn this tide. In this context he pointed out the economic and structural advantages of rounded houses design more than once: the fact that the spherical form and so the dodecahedron to a lesser degree, comprises the greatest contrast with the smallest surface and minimalist structure strongly by the firmest sense of the building materials. Another motive for his rounded house designs was found in the desire of securing the world offer, which can be traced back to our first living environment, the womb.

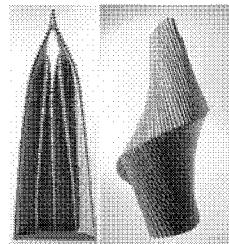


Figure 11 Penrose pattern

The key to quasi-periodicity is fivefold symmetry. The angles of the two rhombuses are multiples of 36° , just like the angles of the pentagram and the pentagon. If we colour all rhombuses in the Penrose pattern of which two sides have the same orientation by the same colour, it turns out that these rhombuses together form a capricious line. In figure 11 these lines have been averaged out, resulting in straight lines. This type of symmetry is sometimes called translational symmetry. What it comes down to is that a particular rhombus determines both the position and the orientation of another rhombus further afield. When we analyse the Penrose patterns a little further still, we can see that they have been built up out of decagons, consisting of five sharp and five obtuse rhombuses. The rhombuses of which such a decagon is construed have one of five different orientations (cf. the numbers in figure 10), again proof of fivefold symmetry. The Penrose patterns are therefore quasi-periodical, but there is symmetry in these patterns nonetheless.

Quasi-periodical patterns are, however, periodical in hyperspace (a space with more dimensions than ours). For instance, Penrose patterns can be defined as periodical patterns in a five-dimensional space. On many occasions, Caris has declared that he views his work as the visualization of higher dimensions, “of which we are certain that they exist in nature, but which could only be described in mathematical terms as three-dimensional projections of higher levels of order.”⁴ At one time, Marcel Duchamp stated that: “a three-dimensional object casts no more than a two-dimensional shadow”, from which he concluded “that a three-dimensional object must in turn be the shadow cast by an object of four dimensions.”⁵ One could say that the periodicity in the Penrose patterns has been lost because they are only a representation at a lower dimensional level of an original at a higher level, just as depth is lost in the two-dimensional shadow of a three-dimensional object.

Penrose patterns can be compared to the homologous structures created by Caris (figure 8). In contrast to homogeneous structures, homologous structures cannot be formed of just one basic form. As is the case in the Penrose patterns, at least two different geometric forms are needed to build these structures.

Roger Penrose published his now famous patterns in 1979, five years before the quasi-crystals were discovered. In response to this publication, scientists wondered if spatial Penrose patterns might exist. This indeed turned out to be true. As Penrose

patterns can be built up out of two different types of rhombuses, so the spatial versions of the Penrose patterns can be constructed from different rhombic polyhedrons or rhombohedrons. Caris' discovery of these rhombic hexahedrons was prompted by an error in a drawing accompanying an article in *Scientific American*, by Martin Gardner. By drawing a dodecahedron and an icosahedron (a regular construct with twenty planes) as duals inside each other he arrived at the acute-angled and obtuse-angled rhombohedrons which make quasi-periodical spatial filling possible. The forms of the rhombohedrons are determined by angles of $63^\circ 26'$ and $116^\circ 34'$. In effect, these rhombic hexahedrons are a type of cubes gone askew. As the cube is the spatial version of the square, so the rhombic hexahedron is the spatial version of the rhombus, consisting of six rhombus-shaped sides. What we find here is that, just as a simple plane, only two bodies are needed in three-dimensional space for quasi-periodical space-filling. Since their discovery by Caris, the rhombohedrons have been the building blocks for a new universe in the making (cf. figure 12).

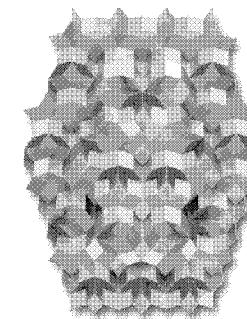


Figure 12 Gerard Caris, Reliefstructure 5 V-1, 2001

In conclusion

In a catalogue for the 1997 exhibition of drawings by Gerard Caris in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum Uli Bohnen made the following remarks: “It was said before that the extension of mathematics and geometry to the arithmetical and graphic manipulation of interdimensional and supra-dimensional functions has advanced at a forceful pace since the 17th century, but that the artists of the same period, with very few exceptions, have nevertheless remained caught in their conventional conception of plane and space. In this we can discover a deplorable detachment of the plastic arts vis-à-vis the problems discussed.”¹⁴

Gerard Caris is one of those few exceptional artists who, using his creative work, is constantly trying to break through the conventional conception of plane and space. Not always a rewarding task, because the new views on plane and space, as they were formed under the influence of scientific discoveries over the past century, easily exceed our imaginative faculties. As it turns out, we become confused by higher dimensions, again and again. The art of Gerard Caris is also confusing: behind its apparent

arbitrariness a complex harmony is concealed, which cannot be grasped or perceived in its entirety, but whose traces are visible to all who take a really close look.

Notes and References

- 1 E. van Uitert, “Passie en precisie, de kunst van Gerard Caris”, (Passion and precision, the art of Gerard Caris) in W. Njio en M. Bertheux (red.), *Gerard Caris, Pentagonisme*, SMA Cahiers 23, Amsterdam 2001, p. 9.
- 2 As quoted in: E. van Uitert, “Passie en precisie, de kunst van Gerard Caris”, (Passion and precision, the art of Gerard Caris) in W. Njio en M. Bertheux (red.), *Gerard Caris, Pentagonisme*, SMA Cahiers 23, Amsterdam 2001, p. 17.
- 3 D. van Delft, “Het pakkende pentagon. Gerard Caris verkent grensgebied tussen kunst en wetenschap.” (The fascinating pentagon. Gerard Caris researches the border land between art and science), in *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 October 1992, Wetenschap en Onderwijs p. 3.
- 4 Quoted in J. Gielis, *Inventing the circle, the geometry of nature*, p. 7. (Original text in The Feynman Lectures on Physics, Commemorative Issue, Volume I, 1989.)
- 5 In 1905, Einstein published a collection of articles. One of these dealt with special relativity.
- 6 See footnote 1
- 7 See page
- 8 The term fractal derives from the French mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot, who first used it in his book *The fractal geometry of nature* of 1982.
- 9 Catharien Romijn, “Passie voor de vijfhoek” (Passion for the pentagon), *Limburgs Dagblad*, 13 October 2001
- 10 D. van Delft, “Het pakkende pentagon. Gerard Caris verkent grensgebied tussen kunst en wetenschap.” (The fascinating pentagon. Gerard Caris researches the border land between art and science), in *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 October 1992, Wetenschap en Onderwijs p. 3.
- 11 After mathematician Roger Penrose, who discovered these patterns.
- 12 G. Caris, *Statement. Voorstelling en betekenis* (Representation and meaning), Maastricht, 15 November 2002
- 13 As cited in: U. Bohnen, “Inter dimensiones, spirit and nature in the creative work of Gerard Caris”, in J. Poot, *Gerard Caris, tekeningen* (drawings), SMA Cahiers 8, Amsterdam, p. 25.
- 14 U. Bohnen, cf. note 13, p. 26.

Gerard Caris and the Nature of Art

ULI BOHNEN

It is said that the philosopher and satirist Salomo Friedlaender (1871-1946) always carried a prism about him so that he would be ready to prove the correctness of Goethe's Colour Theory to followers of Newton when and wheresoever he could.¹ Similarly (and not surprisingly) the Dutch artist Gerard Caris always carries a small pentagonal dodecahedron made up of twelve regular pentagons with him, so that he is always prepared to demonstrate the potentially infinite symmetrical mega-structures which can be made by combining regular pentagons and the solids constructed from them.²

It is certainly not common knowledge that this kind of surface-filling or space-filling reproduction of regular five-sided elements is regarded as extremely complicated.³ Although there are naturally occurring complex structures based on other regular polygons (the hexagon, which forms the basis for honeycombs, crystals forming triangular pyramids or the cubic crystals formed by common salt), those rare occurrences of natural objects with pentagonal surfaces (pyrite, for example) show marked structural discontinuity and lack of regularity. They do not occur in symmetrical groupings, and even less as megastructures.⁴

When in 1984 crystallographers were amazed to learn that a team of scientists had succeeded in producing crystalline complexes based on regular pentagons in a rapidly cooled manganese-aluminium alloy it was decided that these should be known as "pseudo-" or "quasi-crystals"; as the discovery was the result of a technically contrived process, it would have been scientifically incorrect to use the term "crystal" as if it were referring to a naturally occurring formation.⁵

With artistic intuition Gerard Caris had anticipated such structures from the beginning of the '70's.

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One might, in more pointed terms, say that the pentagon serves the same basic function for Gerard Caris as did the rectangle for Mondrian. It is the foundation for everything, both symbolic and practical. It is the rational pattern available for pure and applied design. And because it is not a naturally occurring module for complex structures it is an intellectual construct from the outset. "*Der Geist ist etwas unendlich Höheres als die Natur*" (Intellect is infinitely superior to Nature), runs a line from Hegel's *Ästhetik*, quoted by no means coincidentally in the periodical "De Stijl".

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From time to time experts demonstrate the connection between the dreamlike complexity of M. C. Escher's images and problems of higher mathematics, but neither this, nor the apparent visual discrepancies which occupied this artist throughout his life, should be allowed to obscure the fact that in the final analysis his logical pursuit of rational ways of stating questions and their apparently manneristic translation into the absurd is a sculptural symbolization of transcendental philosophical speculation.⁷ It strikes one as almost moving when one of these images appears -often accompanied by moralistic messages⁸ - in a public place, perhaps as a mural decoration in a post office, or in the sphere of applied graphics, as a postage stamp design, for example. Anyhow, even if the step towards the restructuring of everyday life had a less programmatic character for Escher than it had for the artists of the "de Stijl" group, it is still reasonable to maintain that a vague similarity between Escher's ethical foundation and that of the Dutch Constructivists cannot be denied.⁹ It is debatable how far this observation can be stretched to include Gerard Caris; what follows should be read with a sidelong glance at Caris!

First of all one should be cautious about making Dutch Protestantism the *terium comparationis* with Escher and "de Stijl". It would be more to the point to assume that the Dutch culture area is distinguished by a precociously mediatised, not to say detached, relationship with Nature. The protracted struggle to reclaim land in the North had already had its effect before the cities took up the overseas trade connections in the seventeenth century which brought out the matter-of-fact common sense which is such a characteristic of Dutch culture. In the southern Netherlands (including those

parts of Flanders which now belong to Belgium) the towns had risen to prominence earlier. There were close trade relations with Italy as early as the fifteenth century, and the humanism which came flowing in left clear traces of a far from naive worldliness in even the most impressive examples of sacred conviction - as witness the Ghent altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers! Even if the reasons for this down-to-earth view of reality vary logically and chronologically between the north and the south of the Netherlands, they have a common result; a consciousness of the "obverse of Nature". At the same time, the gradual incorporation of the catholic church (increasingly baroque since the sixteenth century, but not fanatically counter reformatory) in the middle-class society in the south, and the triumph of Protestantism in the north (rounded off by the expulsion of the Spaniards) offered respectively protection and encouragement to a spirituality which has lasted until the present day, managing to combine appreciation of facts with a kind of intensely pantheistic temperament.¹⁰

If one relates these characteristics of Dutch cultural history to Gerard Caris it leads to the assumption that to dismiss his long-term preoccupation with the pentagon as a merely formalistic affair would be to fall short of the mark.

The ornamental effect, for instance, created by combining pentagons, is one which we recognize from Escher and indeed from early Mondrian; it is reminiscent of Dutch Art Nouveau with its liberal sprinkling of colonial influences, but could also be seen as a later echo of Moorish influence which amazed patrons of the Arts in the Netherlands, particularly under the Habsburgs.

Caris is widely traveled and lived for many years in the US. Where the ground of many of his works is tailored to the motifs in question and not merely left as a quadratic or rectangular shape with empty spaces, one might describe the congruity of motif and format as "shaped canvas", following an American practice of the '60's. Caris does so. When the pentagons are so interconnected that they almost overlap the edges of the picture one might be tempted to use another American term in use since Jackson Pollock - "all over". Caris does this as well.

If one considers these methods as European departures from the *European* tradition of painting however, there seems to be something inherently baroque about them. They are overstatements, exaggerations; they exceed the previously accepted norm in an attempt to convey a message. At the same time they get their momentum from experience, talent and an unrestrained joy of discovery. Finally the "all over" can be interpreted as an intellectual play on the idea of infinity. In the text "de docta ignorantia" by Nikolaus Cusanus (1401-1464) this kind of exercise became an attempt to prove the existence of God; with Leibniz (1646-1716) it ended up in infinitesimal calculus.

Gerard Caris is well aware of his European cultural historical roots, and he nurtures them. But he is also contemporary enough not to identify the utilitarian extension of his idea of form exclusively with an ethical or even a moral concept, as seemed objectively unavoidable to Mondrian and was, to all appearances, dear to Escher's heart. His message is modern (contrary to a widespread misunderstanding of what "modern" means) insofar as it uses the past as the fruitful basis for an attempted synthesis of Art and Life; and it is "postmodern" insofar as the synthesis is based on modern conditions.

These range from the existence of the market to the epistemological perspective of the concept of transcendence which has placed science and technology in the place of theology (perhaps even of God) and given rise to thoughts of mediation as a realistic alternative to assumed immediacy.

Both the pentagonal dodecahedron and the works of Gerard Caris are works of Art (not of nature). The works of Caris, placed between us and Nature, allow us a valuable insight. We stand face-to-face with Nature and have possibly a better chance than ever before to relate to *her* and to understand *ourselves*.

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Art Critic lives in Touistvorst

Gerard Caris and the Nature of Art

ULI BOHNEN

It is said that the philosopher and satirist Salomo Friedlaender (1871-1946) always carried a prism about him so that he would be ready to prove the correctness of Goethe's Colour Theory to followers of Newton when and wheresoever he could.¹ Similarly (and not surprisingly) the Dutch artist Gerard Caris always carries a small pentagonal dodecahedron made up of twelve regular pentagons with him, so that he is always prepared to demonstrate the potentially infinite symmetrical mega-structures which can be made by combining regular pentagons and the solids constructed from them.²

It is certainly not common knowledge that this kind of surface-filling or space-filling reproduction of regular five-sided elements is regarded as extremely complicated.³ Although there are naturally occurring complex structures based on other regular polygons (the hexagon, which forms the basis for honeycombs, crystals forming triangular pyramids or the cubic crystals formed by common salt), those rare occurrences of natural objects with pentagonal surfaces (pyrite, for example) show marked structural discontinuity and lack of regularity. They do not occur in symmetrical groupings, and even less as megastructures.⁴

When in 1984 crystallographers were amazed to learn that a team of scientists had succeeded in producing crystalline complexes based on regular pentagons in a rapidly cooled manganese-aluminium alloy it was decided that these should be known as "pseudo-" or "quasi-crystals"; as the discovery was the result of a technically contrived process, it would have been scientifically incorrect to use the term "crystal" as if it were referring to a naturally occurring formation.⁵

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Gerard Caris or Measurable Infinity

JOHAN VANBERGEN

Confronted for the first time with the work of Gerard Caris, the question is immediately raised of the meaning of his geometrical art. What, exactly, is this work about? Such intricacies can only be brought to light through an art critic's description and analysis. Such descriptions, however, often do nothing more than point out the geometrical-serial character of the work, which seems to emanate from certain regular shapes which provide the basis for exploring the possibility of combinations of these geometric patterns. It is, in this respect, vaguely reminiscent of Arabic decorations, or of nineteenth-century, predominantly Anglo-Saxon publications about complex, decorative geometric patterns which were designed and studied by artists of the "Arts and Crafts" movement.¹ These writings were based on the Classical idea that universal beauty derived from the relationship between size and number, according to the laws of harmony. Aesthetics was the science of this universal beauty. Such universal harmony is by definition, however, purely formal and decorative and consequently without content. Does it make sense, therefore, to delve into the content and meaning of work of this sort? In Caris's case, moreover, we are dealing with contemporary work. An art critic's description would therefore attempt to place this work in its own twentieth-century context and describe it as Constructivism, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, or neogeometry with which it displays only the most general and superficial similarities. Caris's works have a spatially constructive effect and are made of cool and shining materials, such as stainless steel, chrome, polystyrene or polyester, plexi-glass, and steel wire and tubes. As in the work of Minimal artists such as Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, one recognizes also in Caris's work connections with geometrical-modular elements. In both cases the physical execution of the work has nothing to do with the creative process, which is completely determined by the concept which precedes it: "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art itself."²

Such a description can hardly be called a thorough analysis of Caris's work, but rather a classification and allotment of his oeuvre to a place in a modern tradition of works of a similar nature, on the basis of outward resemblances only: description of style as a Linnaean classification.

A critical description which limits itself to such general qualifications of style, such as geometric, constructive, or serial, does not teach us much more about this work

and its meaning. Such commentary quickly deteriorates into the blurred arguments that are so typical of dissertations on movements like Minimal and Conceptual art. Characteristic of this general discourse is its domination by pseudo-scientific terminology in which concepts such as construction, structure, space, module, experiment, theory, and basic research continually crop up. However, the descriptive value of these terms with regard to the work of art being examined can seldom be defined exactly. The terms have, for the most part, only a metaphorical meaning. They merely wish to point out to the viewer an objective-scientific character which is clearly recognizable in the work. It is for this reason that writings about this type of art often come across as empty rhetoric, due to the complicated nomenclature and scientific terminology. This is already apparent in one of the earliest writings in this field, the Realistic Manifesto by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. They present Constructivism as a laboratory for basic research, which should consist of "investigations" into form, colour, material, and spatial relations, on an abstract basis, without an explanatory function referring to a concrete or other reality.³ Here one never comes across a definition of the problems posed in this research. One is also left in the dark with regard to "investigation". And because it is unclear what problems are posed by this research, it is also impossible to pin down the solution to these problems. As a result of this basic research, therefore, the work of art is considered to be the solution to a formal problem, the component parts of which are indeterminable. The success of the work of art, i. e. to what degree it has succeeded in solving the formal problem posed, can apparently only be judged on the basis of pure aesthetic intuition. The solution offered for certain problems of form, therefore, has absolutely no logically compelling character. In other words, one can not track down the logic of the development of this sort of research, or which limitations might hinder its progress or even make the solution impossible.

Artistic research, therefore, as opposed to scientific research, seems to function in unlimited freedom. What is called method in critical jargon is ultimately pure intuition. The commentary on this sort of work also operates in complete freedom, not letting itself be tied down to terminological exactitude, nor employing any criteria of logical argumentation.

Hence the Minimal artist Sol LeWitt states that the artistic intuition of his art has absolutely no basis in any theory: "This art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories. It is intuitive, involved in all kinds of mental processes and it is purposeless.⁴ It can therefore not even be said what this sort of art is an intuition of. It is founded on indefinable mental processes and the work of art itself cannot be interpreted as being anything other than "mentally interesting to the spectator". This sort of work is not abstract simply because it has no reference to reality as an image or figurative referent. It is abstract in a much more radical sense, in the second degree, as it were. Modern geometrical art, from whatever direction, does not permit any definition to be given to the determinants of the so-called problem of form which is posed. One can therefore not say what this work is about, i. e. to which concrete reality it refers. Worse still, one can not even say what is being stated on an abstract level about reality, in the form, for

example, of a theoretical explanatory model such as is common in physics. A critical description is also lacking of given elements which, in one way or another, could be articulated.

Especially in the case of Minimal Art, description quickly runs aground due to the lack of such elements, whose complex structure could be put into words. Characteristic of this movement, as is well known, are the simple geometric forms such as the cube, sphere, and pyramid, which call for only the most elementary articulation and arrangement. Now then, it is one of the theses of perceptual aesthetics that the eye has an aversion to forms in which it perceives no order, in other words, chaos. On the other hand, it is also true that the eye is not arrested by shapes which are only and self-evidently orderly. On the contrary, what does fascinate us is looking at forms which are complex and at the same time orderly in nature. Here this order is somewhat hidden in a complexity which is at first difficult to unravel, but while contemplating it, the order emerges as the secret law which governs this complexity, of which it is also the solution.

The static, solid character of simple geometric forms in a given space leads to boredom and this is a reproach which is often heard from critics on Minimal Art. Gerard Caris, in a lecture at the Parsons School of Design in 1981, also articulated this thought: "While those static aspects provide a stable background for physical orientation, they do not allow for much variation in the field of vision. Externally monotonous and internally predictable, the strict adherence to square or nearly square conditions men's spatial perception and narrows his mental scope... Prolonged exposure and keeping in line with uniform visual fields causes boredom."

That which was announced in the pre-war Constructivism of Gabo and Pevsner as basic research of complex spatial structures would, in Minimal Art, result in simple, closed geometric forms whose most important characteristic is their rigid nature as compact volumes in space. Despite the radical rejection by these Minimal artists of thorough analyses and interpretations of their work, one may ascertain that art critics' descriptions of their work does not often limit itself to physical elements such as colour, materials, and size. The search for meaning in this art and the impossibility of articulating a meaning in this elementary form often entices the critic to mere aesthetic contemplation, which naturally slides into a pseudo-religious mystique of emptiness. The commentary is further riddled with metaphorical connotations which, just as flowery, uncontrolled rhetoric, flourish on the very thin layer of humus composed of these elementary forms. The minimal forms and volumes become the object of a contemplative meditation which is the antithesis of scientific research. In other words, these treatises then seem to be a desperate attempt to approach, though only approximately, the sense and meaning of these works.

A critic who is enmeshed in a discourse such as this will have difficulty appreciating the work of Gerard Caris, which is rooted in an entirely different artistic context. He would therefore categorize Caris's work as formal abstract art which is based solely on aesthetic intuition, and would fail to recognize the clear statement of a problem for which a solution is being sought: it therefore has more to do with content

than with pure form. Thinking about a work of art as a thing with content was already problematical in the writings of Kant. He made a distinction between *freie Schönheit* (intrinsic or self-contained beauty) and *bloss anhängende Schönheit* (dependent or relative beauty). With this last concept he meant that the content or the subject of the work of art is not of an essential nature, but rather an added element. The actual artistic element would be situated exclusively in the form. According to Kant, only in the case of intrinsic beauty can the judgement of taste be pure, i. e. aesthetic and unconstrained (*reines Wohlgefallen*). According to later formalistic art history and its investigation of style, art was also to be found in perceivable forms - the purely visible.

Authors such as Riegl and Wölfflin, for example, thought that the subject or content made no essential contribution to the artistic nature of the art work. The form ensured the autonomy of the artistic phenomenon; the work of art had therefore to be dissociated from any content or description of a non-artistic nature. The logic of this theoretical paradigm also led to the phenomenon of abstract art.⁵

This late nineteenth-century formalism, however, which is also the basis of the critical appreciation and theoretical justification of the twentieth-century avant-garde, was itself the offshoot of a much richer literature, in which the content and meaning of the work of art posed the central problem for critical description and interpretation. Only in the last years has attention been drawn to the range of these (often still) unknown aesthetic treatises and literature of art theory, which display this preoccupation with the meaning of art.⁷ It is at present impossible to get an overall picture of the complex theories in these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings, in which, besides science, art is also seen as an instrument for gaining knowledge and truth about reality. The earliest of these writings dates from around the middle of the eighteenth century. The heart of these aesthetic theories is based on the principle of an analogous explanation of reality, which harks back to the age-old analogous thinking of ancient philosophers and thinkers such as the Pythagorians, Platonics, neo-Platonics, gnostics, and cabballists, and which took on its most fantastic forms in the alchemy of the Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century we see a general tendency arising to develop anew a sort of logic from analogous thinking, whereby it was purified of its wildest and most fantastic excesses, to which it had fallen victim in the Middle Ages. The nineteenth-century author George Field states in his book *The Analogy of Logic* (1850): "Hitherto analogy has been consigned to imagination, employed in the construction of symbols, rhetorical and poetical allusion, or common illustrations by example, and excluded from strict ratiocination and science."⁸ Field maintains then, that opposed to inductive scientific thinking which draws general conclusions about the systematic nature of things by observing particular examples, there exists also an analogous way of thinking in which one departs from universal laws in order to draw conclusions about individual cases. The idea was that the whole creation was governed by laws which determined the form of things and accounted for the comparable forms (analogies) between natural phenomena of a most diverse nature, and could shed some light on the essential character of these things. Nature was a network of corresponding forms, in which the things

revealed their true nature. "All knowledge is relational. . . the order of these relations is pure logic and hence the whole system of truth...is analogical."⁹ Analogous logic was therefore based on the idea that the universe was governed by basic universal structures, which could be recognized to be in endless metamorphosis on anorganic, plant, animal, and human levels, and which ultimately provided insights into the spiritual nature of existence and the psyche of man. In other words, the world was seen as an immense network of correlations in which a profound, ultimate meaning lay hidden.

One of the most important writings in which this analogous thinking is recognizable is Goethe's *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären*¹⁰ In this treatise Goethe endeavors to trace, through the multiform nature of the plant world, the basically abstract structure of the transcendental primordial plant.¹¹ The great adventure of philosophy, science, and art was the discovery of the ultimate meaning of the world and human existence. The importance of this analogous thinking is evident not only in the many studies of the phenomenon of synesthesia, in which one attempts to track down the profound correspondences between forms, sounds, and colours. New sciences such as pathognomy and physiognomy, in which one tried to draw conclusions about the character of an individual from his facial expressions, testify to the belief that was attached to the logic of analogy.¹² Analogous thought also forms the theoretical basis of many works of art and aesthetic writings, from Philipp Otto Runge to Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. The theories of Kandinsky are actually close to the origin of abstract art.¹³

The basic principles of this analogous thought are rather easy to identify in pronouncements by artists such as Gauguin, Delaunay, Le Corbusier, Baumeister, Wols, Mondriaan, Malevitch, and many others, although, in the twentieth century, they were no longer supported by an explicit aesthetic theory, but were only identifiable in their writings and aphorisms as residual elements of this theory.¹⁴

This enormous ambition, to develop a logical analogy which attempted to explain, in scientific as well as artistic terms, the total context of the universe - microcosm and macrocosm, world and existence - came to an end in the nineteenth century. This whole line of thinking was then absorbed into new esoteric and spiritualistic movements such as theosophy and anthroposophy, in which it often went into hiding in the form of occultism. The theories of abstract art of Malevitch, Kandinsky, and Mondriaan stijl reflect this analogous thinking about forms, lines, and colours as the expression of a deeper spiritual content.

A more scientific version of a theory, which attempts to explain the expression of forms, lines, and colours as the basic structures of art, is found in the writings of the nineteenth-century Gestalt psychology. The most recent application of Gestalt psychology in the formal analysis of art is found in the writings of Rudolf Arnheim.¹⁵

In this long art-historical digression I have only wished to show that contemporary formalistic art criticism still bears traces of this old complex theory of the analogy of forms which was directed at knowledge and truth about life and reality, and to which both science and art could contribute. The of ten wavering nature of formalistic

commentary in contemporary art criticism is, however, no longer supported by such an elaborate theory of logical analogy, for which reason it of ten degenerates into empty rhetoric full of profound contemplations which vegetate on the work of art and wonder unchecked until they become too rarefied for comprehension.

This all goes to prove how difficult it is to describe the work of Gerard Caris in the terminology of an art critic who attempts to interpret phenomena such as Constructivism, and Minimal or Conceptual Art. Furthermore, if the description of his work is inadequate, then the sense and meaning elude us. One is then able to recognize only the decorative play of geometric patterns.

This digression is also within the framework of the general problem of the adequate description of works of art and the possibility of talking about art in a comprehensible way. In other words, is it possible in Caris's case to describe his work as being something more than structured, constructive, or serial? Can it be more than the enumeration of the materials and techniques with which it was realized? Can we penetrate to the work's message, to its content? If it is a question of content and meaning, then another question is immediately raised, that of the referential character of this work. About which reality is Caris's work speaking? What is his subject, his frame of reference?

One could raise the point that his work is abstract and that the question of content is therefore irrelevant. Indeed, his work is not figurative: it does not refer to a concrete reality which is visually recognizable. But this does not mean that his work is not about something. A philosophical or mathematical discourse also has a frame of reference, which is apparent due to the fact that, emanating from a number of propositions, it becomes a composite whole of propositions in which something is maintained in relationship to something of which this is asserted. In this sense, Caris's work, in spite of its abstract character, can indeed have content and meaning.

This frame of reference, the content of his work, can only be brought to light by an iconographic analysis. One must then assert that it is far removed from the frame of reference of twentieth-century Constructivist tendencies and also has nothing to do with the analogous thought of nineteenth-century aesthetics, as briefly explained above. The physiognomical treatises of Lavater, Goethe's doctrine of metamorphosis, or Klee's *Unendliche Naturgeschichte* (Neverending Natural History) were aimed at discovering universal laws in the phenomena of living nature. The teachings of eighteenth-century natural history and nineteenth-century natural science were their common frame of reference. Their objective was a qualitative description of the universe which was supposed to reveal its deepest spiritual dimension: the unity of micro and macrocosm. This kind of universal natural history was enmeshed in a paradigmatic struggle with the quantitative and inductive science of modern physics, which had been developing since the eighteenth century.¹⁶ "The Napoleonic years saw the steady abandonment of analogy in the life sciences which began to take on the character of the physical. Empiricism and rigorous modes of interpreting experimental results brought a positivistic tone to biological science. The harmony once believed to exist between life and the energies of matter was disrupted."¹⁷

The iconography of Caris's work must be situated in the earliest philosophical research of Antiquity concerning the essence of reality, in the cosmological thinking of Pythagoras and Plato. This thought about the nature of the world and reality was directed especially at the order of the universe, at the cosmos. Cosmos signifies order and beauty and is the opposite of chaos. The order and beauty of the universe are, according to these thinkers of Antiquity, based on relationships of size and their internal harmony.

From the One, the monad, came the numerical series of numbers. The One was also the transcendental Good and Beautiful. The numbers were connected to the greater ordering of reality: the dual nature of the number two was an expression of masculine and feminine duality, the number four described the directions of the wind, the four elements of water, earth, fire, and air, the four seasons, the four temperaments, etc. The fascination that arithmetic and geometry held for these thinkers is apparent from the way in which Plato, without any empirical knowledge, described the qualitative difference between the indivisible building blocks of the four elements, the atoms, as a quantitative difference: "There are therefore four kinds or atoms, each atom of fire is a tetrahedron, each atom of air an octahedron, each atom of water an icosahedron, each atom of earth a cube. The fifth regular polyhedron, the dodecahedron, was used by the deity for the whole (cosmos), arraying it with signs."¹⁸

The thinkers of Antiquity considered the measurable nature of things to be tied up with their essentiality, their specific qualities, or why they are as they are. The essential nature of 011 things expressed itself in measure and number. Only primordial matter was unformed, dead quantitative weight. Aristotle also distinguished between form and raw material. His hylomorphism is the basis of his ontology. Matter is only recognizable because of its measurable form. All specimens of a similar kind are subjected to the same formal law, and thanks to their essential differences from other sorts or species, they may be defined by the similarity of their characteristics. The origin of the essential nature of a thing is the *causa formalis*. A thing becomes recognizable (*forma intelligibilis*) because it is true to its nature, has an identity and is not indefinite. Knowing the nature of things, therefore, means investigating their relationships of size and number. The physical appearance is only an outer layer of an abstract formula which the thing only makes to fit its essential nature, a measurable form.

The fact that the frame of reference of Caris's work must be situated in this thinking from Antiquity about the nature of things and mathematics does not mean that the artist first made a thorough study of the ontology of Antiquity and the role that mathematics played in it. The central idea which is fundamental to his art displays, however, a curious similarity to this way of thinking in Antiquity. It is the idea that qualitative aspects are connected to the numerical series of figures, to geometric shapes, i. e. that numbers or geometric shapes cannot be reduced to mere quantitative relationships. Modern mathematics considers numbers and geometrical figures to be neutral, however. This insight dawned on Caris when he discovered that certain regularities are in play which govern, for example, the possible combinations of certain

geometric figures. It seemed, in fact, that such geometric figures were qualitatively different from others, in that they cannot so easily be combined into continuous patterns. The pentagon is one such unmanageable figure.

The fact that, from Antiquity until the Renaissance, qualitative and not merely quantitative differences were attributed to geometric figures, is already apparent from the symbolic value attributed to the numbers 3, 4, 7, and 10, in mythology, fairy tales, as well as religious rites. They were meant to have a sacred or mystic meaning. In Johann Keplers astronomical calculations, aesthetic-qualitative proportions play an important role in the explanation of the orbiting of the planets. One of the proportions to which the mathematicians of the Renaissance attached great value was that of the Golden Section, in which the relationship between the numbers 3, 5, and 8, the so-called series of Fibonacci, approach the value of 0.618. This means that the number 3 is in the same proportion to the number 5, just as 5 in its turn to the number 8. Lengths which are in the proportion of 1 to 0.618 fulfil the requirements of the Golden Section.¹⁹ This relationship is based on the following equation: the smaller length a and the greater length b are to each other as b is to (a + b) or a: b = b: (a + b). Therefore, if the longer and shorter lengths are given, one can, through further division, produce an infinite series of lengths which are in the proportion of the Golden Section.

These relationships of size have also been established in nature. According to Kepler, the relationship between the time required for one orbit of Earth and Venus was 8: 13.

This relationship was recognized in leaves and flowers, as well as in the branches of a tree, climbing in a series from large at the bottom to small at the top. Also the joints of starfish, the Cochlea snail, the bodies of insects, and even that of man correspond to the Golden Section.²⁰

This established relationship is also found in art. The attempt has been made to unravel the secret of beauty via rational explanations. Beauty is supposedly based on a principle of unity in diversity: the relationship between smaller and larger compositional elements should be the same as that of both of them to the whole of the work of art. The diversity is therefore based on the same ratio.

One finds them in Egyptian architecture and ornamentation, in Greek and Roman temples, in Arabic decoration, in the Gothic cathedrals, and in Raffael's *Sistine Madonna*. Not only Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, but also modern artists such as Johannes Itten of the Bauhaus and Mario Merz remain fascinated by it, and this list is certainly not complete.

This does not prove, however, that the Golden Section is an aesthetic law. In perceptual psychology test persons have been asked to decide which proportions they found aesthetically pleasing. The Golden Section was usually among their choices, but successful experiments to repudiate this have also been carried out.²¹ Much here is unclear. For example, one must take into account optical illusions: the same length, seen in a vertical position, appears to be 7 % longer than when seen in the horizontal position.

There also existed in the persons tested a predilection for proportions such as 2: 3 or 1 : 2. The Golden Section as a rule and law of beauty and harmony is therefore, scientifically speaking, not so self-evident.

It seems that the proportion of the Golden Section is especially preferred by the persons being tested when it enables them to track down equivalents in a complex geometric pattern. Complex figures are seen to be symmetrical if two or more forms are incorporated into the total composition (so that together they become a form of a higher order), or if they crop up as separate lengths in other groups of forms.²²

The regularity of complex geometric figures can be observed by the uneducated viewer only up to a certain point. He can no longer perceive the information from even more complex figures.²³ In order to track down the nature of this regularity one must appeal for help from mathematical analysis. The problem, however, is that the average viewer does not have the mathematical background at his command to make the calculations necessary to transform complex geometric groups. With complex farms such as those of Escher and Caris, the viewer then undergoes an aesthetic experience, i. e. he does perceive the order within the complexity, but the principle which governs this order eludes him, which produces the effect of vertigo. An analysis can help the viewer to trace the rule of symmetry which dominates the whole structure. Without this analysis, he may well see a similarity between elements and the way they are joined in the structure, but not the law governing the similarity. One recognizes this geometric regularity immediately in simple geometric farms, for example in the case of the square, the rhombus, the circle, and the triangle. For this reason, these farms were used in schematic drawings of irregular natural farms, from the time of Villard de Honnecourt to contemporary textbooks of drawing, which still employ this method. In the case of more complex farms, therefore, one has as a viewer an inkling of a higher, mysterious order which is not immediately discernible, even though it is palpably present. It is this tension, that of an unsolved hidden secret, which plays a role in complex ornamental patterns, such as in the work of Escher.²⁴ Here appears the idea of the unfathomable and the infinite, and the insufficiency of human powers of comprehension.

Even for the mathematician who is capable of determining the rule of symmetry which is the basis of such complex patterns by analyzing the systematic nature of the figure, this mysterious element continues to be a baffling presence, albeit on a higher plane. He is also not able to picture the entire visual field of the complex figure. From the multiplicity of visual impressions evoked by the various parts of the composition, his attention can be held only by one certain configuration at a time. Formal relations in the figure which also form other configurations disappear for this reason into the background, against which he sees the profile of the one figure. He can therefore, at any given moment, only retain a limited amount of the information presented: certain lines, angles, points of intersection. Hence a complex pattern has a dynamic character, because it reveals itself in different configurations which, through continuous transformations and metamorphoses, change into ever new aspects. Such patterns, therefore, retain

their mysterious aesthetic effect even for the mathematician.²⁵ The various configurations from the optical field which is the figure itself acquire in each case a certain meaning in each separate configuration and many meanings in their transformation into yet other configurations. It is impossible, however, to gather all the configurations into an integrated meaning of the total visual field. This is all the more baffling for the mathematically experienced viewer who understands that this continually elusive nature of the total picture is in contradistinction to the fact that the figure is based only on a very limited number of rules of symmetry, each of which is reducible. If we call these rules of symmetry, from which the complex figure is generated, the semantic matrix, it means that this is capable of generating a number of configurations as meanings, which are related to each other on the basis of a number of deductions and transformations, but which cannot be integrated in a single reading. The discovery of one configuration leads simultaneously to the loss of the previous one. The viewer remains fascinated by the figure, because the only possibility of tracking down the semantic matrix involves the continuous joining of the figure in ever new readings of other configurations.

In an earlier publication I described the same phenomenon with regard to the iconography of figurative representations in art.²⁶ Even though we can point out the iconographic elements in a representation - identify figures, explain themes, trace allegories - we are nevertheless unable to state, with such an exhaustive explanation of the iconography and the subject of the painting, that the total meaning of the work of art is merely the sum of these individual parts. The most gripping part of an image is, in fact, that between these iconographic elements which are actually of an unambiguous nature, certain semantic and formal relationships become visible, often producing a complex network of connotations. These relationships are of a contextual as well as a formal nature, but both are semantic. An iconographic figure can be associated with another in a contextual way in the same representation, but it may also give rise to recollections from a wider artistic or historical context. The Bible contains good examples of this: Isaac carries the wood for the sacrifice to be made by his father Abraham, Christ carries the cross on which he will sacrifice himself. Figures may also display similarities in composition or colour in a formal sense, these being then directives by which the viewer is led to recognize complex semantic relationships between the figures. These relationships are therefore of both a contextual as well as a formal nature. They form configurations which one would call types in figurative art. In this way originate connections of complex connotations in an image. Connections of semantic elements lying on the same axis are called in semantics isotopes, i. e. they are elements of meaning lying on the same topical plane. It is these isotopes which form the layers of meaning in an image, semantic networks or *réseaux* on which the image may be read. In this respect, those iconographic figures are especially interesting which can be read on more than one isotopic or connotative circuit and are therefore a kind of "shifter", through which the reading of a painting shifts from one plane to another. The same thing then occurs as when observing complex geometrical patterns. The "shifters" lead the viewer over

and over again from one isotopic plane to the other, from one reading to another. The most important characteristic of this is that the total meaning of the work cannot be comprehended in one reading. The semantic matrix continually generates metaphorical transformations between the various isotopic levels and can therefore not be expressed in one definitive reading. It remains the hidden kernel of meaning which always eludes one upon “reading” a painting.²⁷ It is recognizable, but, as the generating principle, cannot be exhaustively described.²⁸

The aesthetic character or effect of a work is, after all, not dependent upon its being more or less complex. A higher degree of complexity does not necessarily increase the puzzlingly intriguing or fascinating character of the figure.²⁹ The isotopic networks and interweavings must be generated by the same matrix, so that, through their transformations, they may be reduced to the simplicity of the matrix. A typical example in this respect is the often semantic *horror vacui* of amateur painters who attempt to enrich their work and make it more profound by loading it with extremely complex symbolic content. Such semantic complexity is, however, not the result of a semantic matrix which generates the connotative wealth of the work via laws of transformation. It consists only of an unstructured conglomeration of iconographic elements.

What makes the structure of meaning in an art work surprising and fascinating is something which remains unpredictable. It is in large measure dependent upon the way in which it refers to a larger socio-cultural context, to the values and conflicts of values in a certain society or period of history. It is, for this very reason, more difficult to be captivated by Gerard Caris’s structures if one approaches them via the context of recent Constructivist currents and their commentary. The meaning and especially the sense of his oeuvre will, however, become much more intriguing when viewed against the background of a mathematical train of thought in which the qualitative character of numbers and relationships of size occupy the center of importance. We recognize this mathematical way of thinking not only in the traditions of Antiquity and the Renaissance, but also in a number of problems posed by science today.³⁰

In interpreting Caris’s work it is therefore important to determine the frame of reference in which it belongs. We may pin down this frame of reference in a type of form which occurs throughout Caris’s entire oeuvre and which determines the rules of articulation and transformation in nearly all his representations: the figure of the pentagon. The artist did not choose this figure, however, due to any prior knowledge of ancient geometry. The choice of this figure and its derivatives was purely intuitive. I refer to the earliest work in which the pentagon appears (Fig. 1). What fascinated Caris in this form was the fact that it could be divided by five diagonals of equal lengths which then produced a pentagram, the center of which was itself a pentagon (Fig. 2). These diagonals intersect each other in the proportions of the Golden Section. Why exactly is the pentagon such an interesting figure? To begin with, it is more complex than geometric figures such as the circle, the square, and the triangle. The number of

angles of these simple figures displays a certain ratio. Their number is not arbitrary. With a triangle, the number of angles is limited to the minimum necessary to fill a plane. With the square, their number is in proportion to the number of directions. And finally, with the circle, the change in angle is minimal.³¹

The triangle, the circle, and the square are basic shapes because they are three irreducible forms of simplicity. All three display a minimal number of irregularities which make them capable of defining the form of a plane. All other regular polygons are indeed more complex, but their greater complexity cannot be used visually to realize regularities other than those in the plane.³² This is especially true of the pentagon. As the first of the series of complex polygons, it was credited with a special symbolic meaning in Antiquity and the Renaissance. The three simple geometric figures (triangle, square, and circle) were associated with the measurable - science and culture. The pentagon, on the other hand, referred to something which could not be reduced to the internal ratio of the plane. The number 5 represented that which rose above the ratio. There are numerous testimonies to the qualitative meaning attached to the pentagon in the mathematics of Antiquity and the Renaissance. Five was the sign of the fifth unfathomable element, the ether, the *quinto essentia*.³³ A special significance was attached to the pentagon, especially because of its capability, when divided diagonally, to produce the pentagram in the proportions of the Golden Section. The pentagon already appeared as a secret symbol used by the Pythagorians, the alchemists of the Middle Ages, and later by Goethe in *Faust*, as well as by the Freemasons. Leonardo da Vinci and, before him, Villard de Honnecourt drew the human figure in this shape.³⁴ The mysterious nature of the pentagon also becomes apparent if one attempts to fill in a plane with one (or more than one) type of polygon, yielding a completely linked-up pattern. This appears only to be successful with three types of polygons: the triangle, the square, and the hexagon. In the case of twenty-two other polygons, one must change over to partially regular divisions, for example with combinations of triangles, squares, hexagons, octagons, and dodecagons. In the case of three polygons, it is not even possible using partially regular divisions to create a joined-up pattern in the plane. This is true in the case of the pentagon, the heptagon, and the decagon.³⁵ For this reason as well the pentagon seems to be a special form.

The idea that a regular form will not yield to becoming a unified pattern is contrary to our feeling that every regular form, precisely because of its regular nature, must be combinable with other regular forms. The strange thing is that this is possible with, for example, irregular pentagons.³⁶ One can, however, fill a space with regular pentagons in combination with other figures such as the fivepointed star and the rhombus. We find such a pattern in the work of Dürer.³⁷ Owen Jones records in his *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) that, among the Arabic geometrical patterns, there exists only one example of quinary symmetry (Fig. 3).

It was Roger Penrose who, in a mathematical study of decorative geometric patterns, re-discovered the connection with the mathematical thinking of Antiquity

and the Renaissance.³⁸ In his wake followed many publications of research in the fields of mathematics, physics, and chemistry about structures with quinary symmetry. It was also ascertained that decorative patterns could be made which display no uniformness, i. e. that they no longer display the same basic structure or periodicity when translated or shifted. A good example is found in *Some New Oxford Books on Mathematics* 1977-78 (Fig. 4). Such patterns were thoroughly studied after Penrose's first publication.³⁹

Here Caris's artistic experiments with decorative patterns based on the pentagon meet up with the interest of scientists in similar phenomena and the mathematical problems they pose. Suddenly, via this scientific research into quinary symmetry, his work appears to have found its place in a very up-to-date and captivating frame of reference. For this reason, Gerard Caris's work has, until now, drawn the attention almost exclusively of scientists, as witnessed by their comments on his work. This does not mean that his work is mathematical or scientific, but that the artistic problems posed by his work and which form the very basis of it, display affinities with the way in which various scientific disciplines make discoveries with regard to quinary symmetry, for which there is no immediate explanation.

The optical effect of the types of patterns designed by Caris and based on the pentagon is that the figure continually fades away to form the background to other geometric shapes with which it is combined to form a unified plane. Because the various geometric forms change from being the foreground to being the background, the plane acquires a pulsating effect which produces a feeling of disorientation. The result is that a pattern based on quinary symmetry seems continuously to expand from its plane into an illusionary three-dimensional space. Through his plane-filling combinations of pentagons and other figures and their parallel, cyclical and alternating connections, Caris continuously evokes such three-dimensional forms, e. g. the dodecahedron (Fig. 5). The optical disfigurement which is a characteristic of the dodecahedron causes an irregular rhombic shape in combination with a pentagon to be seen as a segment of the dodecahedron. This perceptive uncertainty between the pentagon and the rhombus as planes and the threedimensionality of the dodecahedron is to be seen in Caris's numerous relief structures (Figs. 6-13). The concave spaces can just as well be seen as convex forms. In this way Caris succeeds in transmitting a complex feeling of space to the viewer and so evokes, just as Escher, another space.

In spite of years of experimenting with the pentagon and its three-dimensional form, the dodecahedron, Caris experiences daily the secret, intractable nature of this figure. If one turns a dodecahedron on its axis, it remains difficult to recognize optically the regularity of its form. With every turning one can see first four, then six planes (Figs. 14a and 14b). Such revolutions produce optical illusions again and again, which give the impression that one is dealing with an irregular body. When dealing with simple bodies such as the cube or the pyramid, such optical illusions are much more easily recognizable as views of a regular form.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Kepler associated the figure of the dodecahedron with the earth as a heavenly body in its relation to the universe. "*Dodekaedron vero relinquitur corpori celesti, habens eundem planorum numerum quem zodiacus celestis signorum.*" ("For the heavenly body [i. e. the earth] there remains [in this series of planets] in fact the dodecahedron, which has just as many planes as the zodiac.")⁴⁰

The way in which the earth in its relation to the cosmos is symbolized by the dodecahedron, while the binary, ternary, and quaternary symmetry of the other regular bodies symbolizes science and culture here below, points to the fact that Kepler felt the transition from the earthly to cosmic space to be a qualitative leap from science to the mystery of a cosmos on a higher level.

The topicality of Caris's art is made especially apparent by recent discoveries in the field of crystal structures. The symmetry of crystals is based on numbers which are composed of the factors 2 and 3, for example the triangle, the square, and the hexagon. Quinary symmetry does not occur in the case of crystals. If one now takes a look at Caris's combinations of icosahedrons or dodecahedrons, then they seem to mock the laws of crystallography (Figs. 15-28). They give the impression of a symmetrical order, which is in fact not regular. The amazing thing now is that chemists have also discovered crystals with quinary symmetry, in the alloys of certain metals such as aluminium and manganese. It was the Israeli scientist Dany Shechtman who made this discovery in 1982. They are the so-called pseudo-crystals.⁴¹ It seems as though one is dealing here with a qualitative leap from the molecular level to a higher level with quinary symmetry of a somewhat looser structure. The French matter expert J.-M. Dubois of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, in Nancy, France, recently received the first patent for a synthetic material composed of aluminium, copper, and iron, the characteristics of which are similar to teflon.⁴² As in Caris's experiments, the arrangement here of these pseudo-crystals is not arbitrary, but also not regular.

Modern science doubts more and more the existence of an absolute systematic ordering of the universe and its matter. Contemporary research in the field of artificial intelligence has directed its attention to the qualitative aspects of human intelligence and its consciousness. Scientists such as the Belgian Nobel Prize winner Ilya Prigogine were also fascinated by a form of knowledge which deviates from scientific logic and which manifests itself in artistic thinking and design.

One can, as a lay scientist, be fascinated by the work of Caris. One will only be able to get beneath the surface of it, however, if one makes the effort to immerse oneself to some extent in the puzzling aspects of mathematical and other scientific knowledge, just as the study of harmony and counterpoint can contribute to a deeper understanding of the music of Bach. This means of course that concepts such as aesthetics and artistic intuition must once again be taken seriously, i. e. that one must, just as in Antiquity and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, acquire knowledge and understanding of art and that artistic intuition is no longer tossed off as open-ended, subjective fantasy. In this sense, art as well as science are two of the many forms of human *Wirklichkeitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with reality).

Caris's work, which finds its inspiration in size and numbers, is easily connected with both the earliest and the most recent thinking over the cosmos as a recognizable order and ornament, to a cosmology in which nature, the world, and man recognize their principles of order and essentiality. The craving expressed in his work is not so much for the practical reality of applied science, as for an insight into the truth, behind which the ultimate mystery is hiding - knowledge which is at the same time the fulfillment of life. His work is connected to the acceptance of contemporary science of the unpredictability of reality, now that it is confronted with the limitations of the positivistic paradigm, with qualitative barriers in the continuity of the measurable.

Gerard Caris's artistic intuition also creates practical possibilities for alternative designs in our environment. Simple forms such as cubes, prisms, and pyramids are often used in architecture. Other more complex forms, such as those used by Caris, are still shunned by architects and designers. I refer here to Caris's designs: Model E-House, 1983 (Figs. 29a and b and 30), Model D-House, 1985 (Figs. 31 and 32) and model Q-House, 1991 (Fig. 33). Our first experience of space as children comes from the discovery of simple symmetries such as the cube, in which the principle of the four orientations is enclosed. And yet other forms, which would enable us to experience a richer, more complex perception of space, are rarely used in the designs of our daily environment. Authors such as P. Pearce, just as Caris, plead for a richer unfolding of our feeling for space through better designs.⁴³ The artist says, "Before birth you live in the round womb of your mother. But almost before you're born the square begins to take over."

Confronted with Caris's work, the problem posed itself of describing his work in such a way as to drive home the meaning and sense of his oeuvre. The poverty of the critical description of modern geometrical art, such as manifests itself in the commentary on phenomena like Constructivism and Minimal Art, causes one often to seek refuge in an intuitive and vague "empathetic" approach to these phenomena, which, because of their pseudo-scientific jargon, often serve to veil the meaning instead of clarifying it. The reason for this is usually that, by doing so, one hopes to point out the mysterious nature of the art work. On the contrary, it seems to me that two principles must be applied when talking about art: 1) that one CAN talk about art but 2) that certain limitations are set. The task of commentary consists of making those limitations visible, precisely through its description. I hope to have succeeded somewhat in showing, via Caris's example of quinary symmetry, how this at first glance cool, calculating work leads us to this boundary, behind which the mystery occasionally deigns to reveal itself. Here this discourse comes to an end in a paradox: measurable infinity.

Notes and References

1. D. R. HAY, *The Science of Beauty* (1856); *An Essay on Ornamental Design* (1844); O. JONES, *Grammar of Ornament* (1856); see also D. BRETT, "The Aesthetic Science: George Field and the Science of Beauty", in *Art History*, 9, 1986, pp. 336-350; C. DRESSER, "On the Relation of Science and Ornamental Art", in *Proceedings of the Royal Institutions of Great Britain*, Vol. 2, 1854-1858, pp. 350-352.
2. S. LEWITT, '60-'80 attitudes/concepts/images (exhibition catalogue), Amsterdam, 1982, p. 155.
3. C. LODDER, *Russian Constructivism*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1983, pp. 7-40.
4. 4 See Note 2.
5. I refer here to the explanation of perceptual psychology for the characteristic nature of visually unique forms by F. BOSELIE, "De Dodekaëder. Volmaakt veelzijdig voegzaam lichaam" in *Gerard Caris en de Vijfhoek* (Dutch/German museum series) published by F. VAN DER Blij and W. KOTTE, Museum Hed. Kunst (Museum of Contemporary Art), Utrecht, 1988, pp. 58-61. As, up until now, Caris's oeuvre has attracted the attention mainly of mathematicians and chemists, I refer repeatedly to their comments on his work when it concerns aspects which are more at home in a scientific context than in art theory or criticism. My intention is especially to describe the latter. For the sake of clarity, the comments of scientists have been quoted directly in my text, as far as this was possible.
6. J. VANBERGEN, *Voorstelling en Betekenis. Theorie van de kunsthistorische interpretatie*, University Press Leuven-Van Gorcum, Assen Maastricht, 1986. p. 17.
7. K. LANKHEIT, "Die Frühromantik und die Grundlagen der gegenstandlosen Malerei", in *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, N.F., 1951, pp. 55-90; W. HOFMANN, "Beitrag zu einer morphologischen Kunsttheorie der Gegenwart", in *Alte und Neue Kunst. Wiener Kunstmissenschaftliche Blätter*, 1953, pp. 63-80; L. LOHMANNSIEMER, "Der Universale Formbegriff in der Physiognomik des 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der gegenwärtigen Kunsttheorie", in *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, 9, 1964, pp. 44-73. All these studies bring much to light concerning this rich tradition.
8. G. FIELD, *The Logic of Analogy and the Logic of Analogy or the Third Organon*, published by D. BOGUE, 1850, pp. 233 and 222.
9. Quoted by D. BRETT, op. cit., p. 341.
10. J. W. von GOETHE, *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*. With explanatory and concluding remarks by D. KUHN, Weinheim, 1984.
11. See the recent studies by C. LICHTENSTERN, *Die Wirkungsgeschichte der Metamorphosenlehre Goethes. Von Philipp Otto Runge bis Joseph Beuys. Metamorphose in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, 1, (VCH Acta Humaniora), Weinheim, 1990.
12. M. COWLING, *The Artist as Anthropologist. The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art*, Cambridge University Press.
13. W. KANDINSKY, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, (München 1912), Bentele, Bern, 1952; "Punkt, Linie zu Fläche, Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente", *Bauhausbuch*, 9, München, 1926; S. RINGBOM, *The Sounding Cosmos. A Study in*

the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting, (*Acta Academiae Aboensis*, 1 er. A., *Humaniora*, 38, 2), Aboe, 1970. This author demonstrates that Kandinsky's belief in the inherently expressive value of pure elements of form harks back to this analogous thinking, as witnessed by his views on synesthesia. See also Klee's theoretical writings which he wrote while teaching at the Bauhaus: P. KLEE, *Das Bildnerische Denken. Schriften zur Form- und Gestaltungsanalyse*, 1, published by J. SPILLER, Basel-Stuttgart, 1965; Especially the second part: (*Unendliche Naturgeschichte. Prinzipielle Ordnung der bildnerischen Mittel, verbunden mit Naturstudium und Konstruktive Kompositionsweg*, 2, published by J. SPILLER, Basel-Stuttgart, 1970,) testifies to how strongly his theory is rooted in analogous thinking. W. HAFTMANN, *Paul Klee's Wege bildnerischen Denkens* (1950), München, 1957, pp. 126-133. This author demonstrates to what extent Goethe's writings on natural science were a source of inspiration for P. Klee.

14. A typical pronouncement is, for example, that of the painter Jean BAZAINE, in his *Notizen zur Malerei*, Frankfurt a. M., 1959, p. 46, quoted by J. LOHMANN-SIEMER, op. cit., p. 50: "Real sensitiveness exists only when the painter discovers that the movements of trees and the surface of the water are related to each other, only when, after the world had gradually pulled itself together and become condensed in this way, in the middle of this immense number of phenomena, he sees the essential signs stand out, which are his own truth and at the same time the truth of the whole." See also S. LOEVGREN, *The Genesis of Modernism. Seurat, Gouguin, Van Gogh and French Symbolism in the 1880s*, Revised Edition, Hackert Art Books, New York. 1983.
15. R. ARNHEIM, *Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, London, 1972.
16. Goethe's criticism in the *Farbenlehre* of the modern colour theory of the physicist J. Newton is typical in this respect.
17. P. C. RITTERSBUSCH, *Overtures to Biology: The Speculations of 18th-Century Naturalists*, 1964; quoted by D. Brett, op. cit. p. 342.
18. Quoted by W. KOTTE, "Plato en Caris geven elkaar de vijf" in F. VAN DER BLIJ and W. KOTTE, op. cit. p. 17.
19. P. HUYBERS, *De gulden snede en het werk van Caris* (exhibition catalogue), Technische Hogeschool, Eindhoven, 1980, p. 6.
20. For more examples see P. HUYBERS, op. cit., pp. 11-18.
21. M. SCHUSTER, *Psychologie der bildenden Kunst. Eine Einführung*, Roland Asanger Verlag, Heidelberg, 1990, pp. 120-121. This work is the most recent *status quaestionis* on this complex problem and offers an extensive bibliography.
22. Ibid., p. 122.

23. Examples of such simple and complex figures are to be found in P. HUYBERS, op. cit., p. 25, Figs. 1,2, and 3.
24. With regard to this, see G. CARIS, "Een onderzoek naar de samenhang en betekenis van Eschers werk", in *Bonnefans*, 7. 2. 91, Maastricht.
25. My views differ in this respect from that of authors such as A. V. SHUBNIKOV and V. A. KOPTSIK, *Symmetry in Science and Art*, Plenum Press, New York, 1974, p. 7: "The aesthetic effects resulting from symmetry (or other law of composition) of an object in our opinion lies in the psychic process associated with the discovery of its laws." The solution of the puzzle of complexity through the discovery of the regularity of the figure should, at the same time, solve the mysterious nature of the figure and mean the end of the aesthetic experience.
26. J. VAN BERGEN, op. cit., pp. 39-76 and pp. 128-154.
27. For examples of this phenomenon I refer the reader to a number of works by Poussin, Magritte, and others, which were analyzed in this way; Ibid., pp. 47-54 and pp. 147-154.
28. It is obvious that not every work of art displays such an immanent and complex structure. Its aesthetic meaning can also be determined by the position the work occupies on the macro-level of artistic tradition. In this way, M. Duchamp's "ready-mades" generate a complex meaning on the macro-level of the tradition itself by the way in which they destroy this and bring to light in a disconcerting way the limited paradigm of art as mimicry, by radicalizing the dialectic reality vs. representation. An interpretation, therefore, cannot and should not limit itself to the so-called immanent or autonomous-aesthetic character of an individual work of art.
29. This is also true of perception. "The visual structure which arises, for example, by putting together a number of geometric bodies, must be surprising. The surprising part must not be caused, however, by bodies being put together in an incomprehensible, complex manner. Whenever a large number of new angles and lengths are introduced in the design of a set-up - angles and lengths which are not borrowed from the form of the objects being put together - then a complex attention-grabbing something is admittedly produced, which, however, remains visually formless because it has no visual limitations." F. BOSELIE, op. cit., p. 70.
30. With regard to the problem of the complexity and order of an aesthetic structure, it seems appropriate at this point to examine the explanations of works of art by Gestalt psychology, such as those given by R. Arnheim (see note 15). The Gestalt-psychology aesthetic more or less defends the position that the aesthetic experience is based on perceptual structures which order the complexity of the representation according to simple geometric figures, thus lending it a certain simplicity and harmony. R. Arnheim also constructs abstract geometric patterns which, applied to a transparency, are then laid over a mostly figurative representation, supposedly revealing in this way its compositional scheme. The problem is, however, that this

usually gives rise to a very static-formalist interpretation of the work of art. The author can also not prove that a representation is indeed articulated, according to such perceptual structures. Analyses of this sort sound clichéd: the structure of the work seems thereby to be pre-determined. Which formal elements in a given work are expressive, however, is dependent upon extremely variable factors, including the type, and the wider artistic and socio-cultural context. However, the most important objection to Gestaltpsychology explanations is that its analysis of form and composition is nowhere connected to an interpretation as regards the inconographical content. A Gestalt-psychology interpretation which attempts to reveal the geometrical harmony and symmetry of an art work ultimately harks back to the idea that structure and order are in themselves aesthetic. This interpretation has its roots in a nineteenth-century *Einfühlungstheorie*, such as that of Th. Lipps, who fits in with the analogous thinking of Romanticism. O. SCHUSTER, op. cit., pp. 123-124, criticizes Arnheim's views: "As the laws of symmetry are nothing other than the structural laws of the construction of matter and therefore also of organisms, it can naturally be debated whether or not there exists an isomorphy between the laws of symmetry of one's own formation (in works of art, for example) and the laws of symmetry of the nervous substratum. An isomorphy of this sort contrasts with Arnheim: 'In the case of a work of art, the value and also the main attraction of the structural theme is derived from humanity, whose types of order it makes evident... What is ultimately required is that this order imparts a realistic, true, and profound view of life.'" O. Schuster's criticism of the Gestaltpsychology aesthetic is, ultimately, that the theory of the *Einfühlung* and the empathetic experiencing of forms in the art work has, until now, never been grounded on anything and therefore remains purely speculative.

31. F. BOSELIE op. cit., p. 62.
32. Ibid.
33. W. KOTTE, op. cit., pp. 20-23.
34. P. HUYBERS, op. cit., pp. 1-9.
35. Ibid., p. 24.
36. F. VAN DER BLIJ, *Strukturen in het werk van Gerard Caris*, in F. VAN DER BLIJ and W. KOTTE, op. cit., pp. 32-36.
37. Ibid., p. 39, Fig. 28.
38. R. PENROSE, *The Role of Aesthetics in Pure and Applied Science* 1974.
39. F. VAN DER BLIJ, op. cit., pp. 38-39. I have based this whole passage mainly on his description of the problem of filling in a plane decoratively.
40. Quoted in a translation of P. Huybers, op. cit., p. 41.
41. F. W. SARIS, "Hoe weten die atomen dat?", in F. VAN DER BLIJ en W. KOTTE, op. cit., p. 55.

42. "Kwasi-kristallijne materialen vinden proctische toepassingen", in *De Standaard*, 2-3 February 1991, p. 7.
43. P. PEARCE, *Structure in Nature is a Strategy for Design*, M.I.T. Press, London, 1978.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Stephen Jaeger, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, pp. 424.

Enchantment is the effect of charisma and “charismatic” is a subcategory of the sublime, says the author Jaeger. He picks up the notion of charisma from the sociologist Max Weber: “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader”. (p. 11)

Charisma implies a kind of force and authority, but its orbit varies so as to cover love, passionate devotion, elevation, transformation and, even destructive obsession. In the context of art and aesthetics the author uses the notion of charisma mostly in the sense of elevation that the works of art exercise on the audience. He complains that this term has not yet found an entry in any encyclopaedia of aesthetics, poetics or literary theory such as published by the University presses of Oxford, Princeton and Johns Hopkins. Therefore he undertakes to expound a theory of charisma as a subcategory of the sublime that developed as early as the Roman critic Longinus whose *Peri Hypsous* focuses on the height (*Hypsous*) of literary expressions that elevates the reader’s mind to a super mundane state. Longinus’s *hypous* translated as the “sublime” stands on an aesthetic footing different from the persuasive rhetorical expressions treated by two other Roman critics Cicero and Quintilian. Elevation and persuasion are quite two different functions of verbal expressions.

Further, Longinus and Kant offer two different versions of the sublime. Kant’s notion corroborates the Aristotelian notion of magnitude, that, which goes beyond human comprehension. But Longinus pleads for elevation to a supernatural height. Aristotle’s *mimesis* of reality or nature is a criterion of artworks that are either more than real or less than real: ‘Mimetic artists...can represent people better than our normal level, worse than it, or much the same.’ But Longinus always pleads for transnational level that heightens human experience. Contextually, Jaeger refers to the classic work of Erich Auerbach – *Mimesis* that treats representational character of Western literature.

“This book wrote mimesis and representation of reality into the history of Western literature. By tying art to the real, Auerbach at the same time created, or opened the door to a large project of investigating Western art and literature in their sublime, charismatic, hyper-real aspects” (p. 2). Whereas Auerbach confines himself to literature, Jaeger extends the scope of his investigation beyond literature – to painting, sculpture and film. The dominance of *mimesis* or representation (of reality) has been due to a strong rationalist anchoring. Jaeger thus distinguishes between Aristotle (inter alia between the Roman Aristotelians such as Horace, Plutarch and all others, and on the other hand, Longinus in their differences between realistic and

hyper-realistic approaches to art. He focuses on the congruence of experience and representation. His approach is phenomenological – the experience of the audience that distinguishes between art and non-art: the difference between life and art ceases or even is weakened when the beholder perceives charisma either in a real object or in its representation, i.e., art. Thus Jaeger proposes an affective theory of art – “The response to the work of art is central to my study.” (p. 4) It is this emotional response of the audience that is completely ignored by Auerbach whose rationalistic/ realistic approach was confined to the analysis and literary style of the works that he studied in *Mimesis*. If Auerbach correlated the Roman rhetorics with Aristotelian *mimesis*, Jaeger, following the line of Longinus, opposes the persuasive function of literary discourse pleading for a transformative function, not of literary discourse only, but of all function, not of literary discourse only, but of all the genres of artworks: “The effect of the sublime is not to persuade the audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves.” (p. 4)

Then what qualities constitute charisma in art? In answer Jaeger appeals to three theorists W.J.T. Mitchell (“What Do Pictures Really Want?, 1996), David Freedberg (*On the Power of Images*, 1989) and Alfred Gell (*Art and Agency*, 1998). Gell’s concept of “agency” in art and Mitchell’s idea of dynamism in pictorial art connote some qualities/ effects of living beings – will, desire, ability to generate certain kinds of action in the viewer, and this approach is commodious to the idea of charisma in art that sharpens the focus on a particular human quality or potential. But both Mitchell and Gell point to this quality objectively whereas Jaeger argues for an interaction of art and its audience necessary for the charismatic effect that Jaeger calls “enchantment”. Obviously Jaeger appeals to the postmodernist perspective of inter-subjectivity – a text is meaningful only in its interaction with the response of its audience, otherwise a text does not carry any meaning in itself: “This book is perhaps best characterized as a study of response to art above all its educating and transforming effects.” (p. 5), although the way art produces charismatic effects is a question that resists any univocal answer.

Along with charisma Jaeger brings in another critical term – “aura” that is closely associated with charisma and there is no hesitation in a reader to accept the validity of this association. He cites an example from Joseph Roch’s *It* (2007), where the author fuses the medium with the artwork, somewhat in Merleau-Ponty’s fashion, an accretion of the stage-actor’s body and the role it plays – the “effigy” and the “ghost”. Quite commonly, the popularity, or say charisma of a cinematic actor/ actress depends upon, or grows out of a harmonious blend of the person’s physical appearance and the character of which he plays the role. This relationship is organic in nature, because one is meaningless without the other. This accretion is the very secret of the success and popularity, otherwise called “aura” of the whole phenomenon called theatrical performance.

Theatrical performance as the model artwork can be extended to all other arts explaining the accretion of the medium and the artwork as a whole. Once this stand is

accepted, it is easy to trace the genesis of charismatic art in the very sense and style of decorating human body during the primitive age. The living human body was the very medium of representation. Tattooing, masking and painting the human body has been important media of religious rituals intended for various purposes such as representation of the gods, spirits, eradication of malefic spiritual effects, protection from diseases, and of course with an aesthetic intention for beautification of the body such as so as to appear *charismatic* for attracting others. The author here invokes several sources, particularly anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, Karl Steinev and literary critics like Roland Barthes for illustrating and justifying his arguments that art originated in (re) presenting charisma in several media. In its journey from religious performance to secular art from sacred to profane it is this charisma, a specific glamour that enchants the audience that has dominated the artworks in all their genres. Duchamp's *Fountain* is even no exception. In the pages that follow the author's introductory remarks attempting at defining the term charisma and its cognate "aura" the author has treated the epic of Homer, tragedy of Sophocles, medieval religious sculptures, Romance and Adventure literary genres, Renaissance painting by Albrech Durer, *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, modernist poet Rainer Rilke, Classical American Cinema, Alfred Hitchcock's modernist film and Woody Allen's late twentieth century cinema. Jaeger thus follows the raw schemata of Auerbach to juxtapose his theory of Charisma, the phenomenology of audience-response against the former's rationalist tie with the Aristotelian mimetic objectivism.

Drawing on Weber again, the author observes that there are grades of charisma, as there are "pure forms" of charismatic personalities such as Shamans, berserks and prophets: "Applied to art and literature, it is possible to argue that some media and genres manifest the charismatic mode better than others." Thus in the third chapter he opposes Homeric epic to Sophoclean tragedy arguing that the epic aims at catharsis: "Tragedy may draw on elements of charismatic representation, but it does not do what the epic does – magnify the subject and inspire imitation. In that sense epic is more "purely" charismatic than tragedy. (p. 98) Whereas in Aristotle's view the only difference between the two genres – epic and tragedy – is that of length, the basic character being the same, i.e., imitation of serious human action, Jaeger's challenging arguments need careful examination. How can one agree that Odysseus is more "charismatic", more "purely" charismatic than Oedipus? Does tragedy project a pessimistic view of human life? Is catharsis unfit for causing enchantment in the audience. Is there no "aura" around the character of Oedipus who does not enjoy the company of feudal lords like Alkinous (who share the aristocracy of divine beings) and is not coveted by women like Nausicaa, rather is betrayed by the cruel destiny to sleep with the woman who conceived him? Jaeger himself confesses "...it would be wrong to imagine that epic shows men as god like, while tragedy shows them deceived fools. Both forms have in their highest realizations in the ancient world the effect of glorifying heroic characters and so also the human condition." (p. 88) In no condition, one can over-rule the Aristotelian depth of catharsis causing an elevating enchantment in the audience.

Who can question the "purely" charismatic personality of Oedipus in his super human struggle for discovering the truth that plays the role of a villain which fails to vanquish the valour of the hero shining ever in the history of human civilization much more brilliantly than the romantic expeditions of an Odysseus or a Don Juan Jaeger's analysis of the tragic structure as a tension between enigma revelation, comparable to that of detective/ mystery novel (e.g., Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*) appears (p. 91) unacceptable by us. His statement "Revelation is consistent with the indestructibility of Odysseus, guarantees survival and a course of life pleasing to man and gods, and so exercises a magnetic attraction on the audience. Enigma is the undermining of charisma...", sounds contradictory when Oedipus's exploration of the enigma of destiny at all cost enhances his charisma to the highest point unattainable by the expeditions of an Odysseus. The catharsis of pity and fear transforms common human feelings and emotions to the level of a sublime experience called *Rasa* in Sanskrit poems, whereas in *Odyssey* there is no such sublime transformation of emotions and feelings. Moreover, Odysseus's charisma aspires an elevation from earth to heaven whereas Oedipus's charisma is manifest in his struggle for an elevation from humanity to an ethereal superhumanity.

But keeping these individual cases aside, Jaeger's major aim at evaluating some aspects of art viewed in the light of charisma, aura, hypermimesis and the sublime through the entire spectrum of the Western cultural history is itself an epical dimension in critical exercise that successfully complements Erich Auerbach's survey of the Western literary history in Aristotelian perspectives of realistic objectivism. Aristotle-Auerbach juxtaposition with Longinus-Jaeger in a remarkable critical fashion appears an invincible intellectual courage. The author concludes: "What this book aims at in large part is to show the transforming force of participation in the life of works of art, to show the dynamics by which the viewer or reader is drawn into a kind of art and literature especially fashioned to stimulate participation. ... What constitutes charismatic art in its fullest form is the cooperation of charisma and aura...charismatic effect in art depends to a great extent on the preparation of the viewer or reader to perceive it..." (pp. 372-373).

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Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*, London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 255.

Terry Eagleton's *The Event of Literature* is currently in discussion in the academic forums of literature and theory across the world. In the book, he has made a modest, liberal and pragmatic approach referring to the parameters of select Western philosophical canons, common linguistic and literary theories with admixture of the commonsense understandings of literature in our time. We know that in his earlier books like *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (1983, revised 1996), he traces the history of the study of texts, from the Romantics of the nineteenth century to

the postmodernists of the later twentieth century. His approach to literary criticism remains firmly rooted in the Marxian tradition though he has also incorporated techniques and ideas from more recent modes of thought as structuralism, Lacanian analysis and deconstruction. In his *After Theory* (2003), he represents a kind of about-face: an indictment of current cultural and literary theory and what Eagleton regards as the bastardisation of both.

While developing a revisionist attitude to analyze literary work of art, he does not forget to bring in the highlights of the two other famous books written on the thrust topic so far viz. *What is Literature?* (1988) by Sartre and *Theory of Literature* (1949) by Wellek and Warren. Sartre, one of the most influential philosophers and literary critics of the existentialist movement discusses the differences between literature and other arts such as music and painting. His argument is that prose writing is different from all other media because of the relationship between the individual and language itself. He says that we might not know anything about musical scales for instance, but we cannot know about language. In the context of 'Why We Write', he says that there are some fascinating and vigorous reflections on the psychology of writing and reading and that the meaning of writing remains only latent until it is brought alive in the reader's mind, and his observation that "reading is directed creation" is, so to say, Reader-Response Theory summed up in four words.

Theory of Literature is a book on literary scholarship by Rene Wellek a member of the Prague school structuralism and Austin Warren a self-described 'old New Critic'. The book describes various aspects of literary theory, criticism and history. After defining various aspects and relationships of literature in general, Wellek and Warren divide analysis of literature based on two approaches: extrinsic, relating to factors outside a work such as the author and society, and intrinsic, relating to factors within such as rhythm and meter. They stress the need to focus on the intrinsic elements of a work as the best way to understand it. In doing so, they adapt the phenomenology of Roman Ingarden.

The book under review contains a preface and five chapters. In the 'Preface' he makes the point clear that the book takes a liberal, open, general yet up-to-date account of understanding the basics of literary works in the light of the philosophical, linguistic and literary theories we know so far. He declares his purpose of rejuvenating the literary theories of 1970s and 80s in order to avoid imbalance in interpretation of literature in the heat of the studies of literature mostly that go along with postcolonialism, ethnicity, sexuality and cultural studies. He says that this is an 'evolution to be welcomed' in the course of 'shift from discourse to culture – from ideas in a somewhat abstract or virginal state' (p.ix) with an investigation of the critical trends of the 70s and 80s in the light of the present scenario of literature. He says that 'this book is an implicit rebuke to literary theory' and rather much of his argument, apart from the final chapter, draws not on literary theory based on the philosophy of literature because, according to him, literary theorists have 'too often cold-shouldered this sort of discourse, and in doing so they have played their stereotypical role in the age-old

contention between the Continentals and the Anglo-Saxons.' (p.x) They seem to lead a controversy with the approval between literary theory and philosophy of literature. He reacts that such intellectual conservatism and timidity of so much philosophy of literature is characterized by fatal lack of 'critical flair and imaginative audacity.' He puts up ironically that, some of these theorists behave as though they never heard of Frege, whereas the other acts as though they have never heard of Freud. He remarks that literary theorists tend to give little attention to questions of truth, reference, the logical status of fiction and the like, while philosophers of literature 'often display a marked insensitivity to the texture of literary language.' (p.x)

He then touches the line of the age old question 'Can there be a definition of literature?' and subsequently focuses on many important logical sub-questions in the field of literary theory. His concerns in this book are broadly based on

- i. the question of whether one can speak of 'literature' at all
- ii. how the term 'literature' is generally used today
- iii. characterizing fictionality
- iv. the question whether literary theories with their various forms have central features in common or not (pp.xi-xii)

Chapter one entitled 'Realists and Nominalists' presents his views on the dispute between realists and nominalists that flourished most vigorously in the later Middle Ages among a number of eminent schoolmen of opposite persuasions leading to two sets of questionnaires. They are:

1. Are general or universal categories in some sense real, as the realists claim in the wake of Plato, Aristotle and Augustine, or are they, as the nominalists insist, concepts which we ourselves foist upon a world in which whatever is real is irreducibly particular?
2. Is there a sense in which literature or giraffeness exists in the actual world, or are these notions entirely mind-dependent? Is giraffeness simply a mental abstraction from a multitude of uniquely individual creatures, or are such species as real as those individuals, if not necessarily in the same way?

In fact, Nominalism and Realism are the two most distinguished positions in Western metaphysics dealing with the fundamental structure of reality. For the Nominalist camp, abstractions are posterior to individual things, being ideas derived from them; for the realists they are in some sense anterior to them. The running battle between realists and nominalists is among other things a question of '...how seriously one takes the sensuously specific'. This is what he claims to be a political matter as well as an ontological and epistemological one coinciding Nietzschean fashion of unique identities of objects.

But, he notices that for Hegel and Lukács, by contrast, knowledge of essences can liberate the individual object into its true nature, revealing what it covertly is. In a similar way, he finds that the Romantic imagination transforms the phenomena into the image of their essences, while preserving the fullness of their sensuous presence. (p.9)

He synthesizes that language is ‘essentialised’ or ‘phenomenalised’, rendered not semiotic but iconic, linked by an unbreakable bond to a reality which can only be signified in this particular way.

This he concludes by saying that most literary types are in this sense natural-born nominalists, whether of the old-style liberal or newfangled postmodernist kind. There might be movements away from theory but they lead towards truth. So, in this way, he recognizes that all theorizing is flight and that ‘Theory is one thing, while art or life is another.’ (p. 14)

In the second chapter entitled ‘What is Literature?’, he questions whether something called literature actually exists or not. Primarily, he focuses on the properties of literary work in terms of linguistic and literary interpretations. Referring to his earlier work *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, he argues that the nature of literature is a strongly anti-essentialist case. Those pieces of writing dubbed literary have no single property or even set of properties in common. (p. 19)

Along with Thomas Aquinas and Stanley Fish he believes that things without essences have no real existence correlating his belief with to E.D. Hirsch who argues that literature has no independent essence, aesthetic or otherwise. It is an arbitrary classification of linguistic works which do not exhibit common distinctive traits, and which cannot be defined as Aristotelian species. But, he quotes John Searle and Wittgenstein saying that literature is a ‘family-resemblance notion’. (p. 9). He refers to Christopher New’s remark that, ‘...all literary discourses would resemble some other literary discourse in one way, but they would not all resemble each other in a single way’. (p. 21) On the basis of need they vary but they might have similar discourse features.

Relating to art and literature, he says that the fact is that art is made up of too amorphous a set of objects for this to be done with any great reasonability. Literature, however, is a less amorphous phenomenon than it. A crime thriller and a Petrarchan sonnet are scarcely lookalikes, but they would seem to have more in common than do impasto, a bassoon solo and a glissade in ballet. So, perhaps family resemblances can be more easily picked out in the case of works that people call literary. They mean by ‘literary’ a work which is fictional, or which yields significant insight into human experience as opposed to reporting empirical truths, or which uses language in a peculiarly heightened, figurative or self-conscious way, or which is not practical in the sense that shopping lists are, or which is highly valued as a piece of writing. The fictional, moral, linguistic, non-pragmatic and normative factors are combined in a specific piece of writing to make it literary. This literary work talks in a certain way about its language, moral vision, and fictional credibility and so on including literariness.

He argues that a work may be called literary because it is fictional and verbally inventive even though it is morally shallow or because it yields significant moral insights and is ‘finely’ written but non-fictional; or because it is non-fictional and morally trivial but superbly written and serves no immediate practical purpose, and so on. Some people might count literature as a pragmatic but verbally decorated text

whereas others might regard the fact that it has a practical function as outweighing its rhetorical allures. He expands the discussion by saying that a private diary kept by a survivor of Nazi Germany may also be ranked as literature because of its historical value, along with the depth and poignancy of its moral vision, despite being non-fictional, pragmatic and appallingly written.

In this context, he discusses Wellek and Warren who insist in their *Theory of Literature* that there is a special literary use of language, a claim that has turned out to have embarrassingly few adherents. Literary theorists these days are well-nigh unanimous in their conviction that there are no semantic, syntactical or other linguistic phenomena peculiar to literature.

He directs our attention towards more liberal form of identifying literature. According to him even the British Banking Act of 1979, with a statement sounds like a tongue-twister or piece of wordplay; one might see it as an instance of the self-referentiality it speaks of, hence qualifying it for literary status on a formalist view of the matter. (p. 36) In this way, people sometimes grant the title of literature to works which are finely but not self-consciously written, rather than simply to those which are verbally self-regarding. He says:

They may see an economy and lucidity of language, or a certain sinewy plainness, as more admirable than a bristling thicket of exotic tropes. Fine writing, like good manners, may be thought to involve a certain self-effacing unobtrusiveness – though if it becomes understated enough, as with Roland Barthes’s ‘degree zero’ writing, it becomes obtrusive once more. Hemingway is the standard example. Stylelessness can be a style in itself. (p. 37)

He brings in F.R. Leavis who is keen on signs and takes a stern view of autonomy of texts. Then, he argues quoting Stanley Fish that there is no general intrinsic difference between ‘literary’ and ‘ordinary’ language, and insists that what we call literature is simply language around which we draw a frame, indicating a decision to treat it with a peculiarly focused attentiveness. (p. 39) Fish’s concept could be seen as the critical equivalent of decisionism in ethics where the contexts of literature are part of the way the world is, since for Fish ‘the way the world is’ is itself a product of interpretation. Interpretations generate facts but not vice versa. The so-called facts of the text are generated by the reading of it. As for the Kantians, it is phenomenal appearances which intrude their ungainly bulk between the reader and the world as it is in itself; for the postmodernists it is discourse or interpretation. For the formalists like Roman Jakobson, it is a ‘set towards the message’ – meaning that it is a question of orienting ourselves to a piece of language as valuable and significant in itself. It is hard to see how this clearly distinguishes poetry or fiction from, say, history or philosophy. The language of such works is not always a purely instrumental affair, inviting us to pass straight from the sign to the referent in brisk disregard of the former as a value in itself. Even quoting Victor Erlich, he says that ‘In literary art ideological battles are often

acted out on the plane of the opposition between metaphor and metonymy, or metre and free verse.' The same can be true of a work's structural aspects.' (p.46)

He agrees with Wellek and Warren that literary texts are those in which the 'aesthetic function' is dominant. But then he goes on saying that aesthetic features are not restricted to works dubbed as literary. Assonance, chiasmus and synecdoche may be more common in an advertisement than in a literary work of art. In addition, design, formal complexity, unifying themes, moral depth and imaginative creativity, however, are not the monopoly of literature. They can be just as characteristic of a treatise on human psychology. Poems and novels as 'imaginative' writings are not the only reasonable way to characterize literature. The other kinds of writings such as political and ethical theories that guide our action in the world in a sense are also literary works. Even advertisements exploit poetic devices for the distinctly non-poetic goal of making profit.

Literature is a quality of attention. It is the way it makes us find ourselves already biased and attuned when we pick up a book. We submit some texts to especially close scrutiny because we take the word of others that they will turn out to deserve it. Good works of literature are those that resemble other good works of literature, allowing us to do with them what we are accustomed to doing. The literary canon submits itself to no other court of judgment than self-confirming. (p. 57)

The third chapter entitled 'What is literature? (2)' focuses on the moral and non-moral dimensions of literary works. He uses the word 'moral' to signify the realm of human meanings, values and qualities, rather than the deontological, anemically post-Kantian sense of duty, law, obligation and responsibility. He finds that the literary figures in the nineteenth-century England, from Arnold and Ruskin to Pater, Wilde and Henry James, helped to shift the meaning of the term 'morality' from a matter of codes and norms to a question of values and qualities. It was a project consummated in the twentieth century by some of the age's most eminent critics like Bakhtin, Trilling, Leavis, Empson and Raymond Williams. Moral values and literary meanings have in common the fact that they are not objective but are not purely subjective either. For a moral realist, moral judgements pick out real features of the world rather than simply expressing attitudes to them.' (p. 62)

It is true that literary works often produce the effect of lived experience through written signs. Everything that happens in a literary work happens in terms of writing. Characters, events and emotions are simply configurations of marks on a page. Also, literary works represent a kind of praxis or knowledge-in-action, and are similar in this way to the ancient conception of virtue. Like virtue, they have their ends in themselves; in the sense that they can achieve those ends only in and through the performances they signify. 'Literature yields us a type of moral cognition which is not readily available in other forms.' (p. 64) The kind of moral insight at stake in literary works is more like personal knowledge than knowledge of facts. Art thus represents an alternative mode of cognition to Enlightenment rationality. Literature does not disclose truths but

establishes close links between fictional form and moral cognition which implies an evaluation of truth.

In a liberal sense, he says that these days, texts such as essays on fish breeding, despite being 'non-moral', non-fictional and indifferently written might still be deemed literature by being treated 'non-pragmatically', used as an occasion for reflections which range beyond their evident functions. The non-fictional discourses, such as government reports on the leather industry, as opposed to fictional government reports on public disturbances which once more exonerate the police from all blame, shape and select their materials, occasionally employ narrative form constitute fictional features too.

The non-pragmatic as a constitutive feature is also nowadays called literature that sheds most of its traditional social functions which cannot be predicted, in the sense that we cannot predetermine what 'uses' or readings of them may be made in this or that situation. They are inherently open-ended, capable of being transported from one context to accumulating fresh significance in the process. The burning example is Burke's political speeches which are literary because of their figurative fertility, rhetorical brio, emotional bravura, dramatic virtuosity and so.

A work is called literary because its meaning is somehow supposed to be generalised and that what it presents is offered not just for its own sake but as resonant with some broader or deeper significance. He discusses Claude Lévi-Strauss' mythological signs and Peter Lamarque in this context who argue that a literary work not only presents a world but invites thematic interpretation of it, in which its content acquires a broader significance. (p. 32)

In terms of the structuralist interpretation, literary texts typically exploit the doubled nature of discourse by portraying irreducibly specific situations which are at the same time, by the very nature of language, of more general import. In Derrida's term, they are 'exemplary' too. There is a paradox involved in the dual nature of language. When this dual strategy rises to self-consciousness, it becomes allegorical. Deconstruction may see the literary work as a symbolic act seeking to achieve certain effects in a determinate context.

Literature is the 'thickest' description of reality that we have. Literary works have the power to present things in their tangible presence, and thus draw the reader in. But like the Husserlian phenomenology, they can also free them up to be viewed from a number of different angles, 'thus combining the palpable with the provisional.' (p.87)

In the context of defamiliarization and with reference to the semiotics of Umberto Eco, he says that literary texts are a reassessment of codes which issues in 'a new awareness about the world' and he continues to prove it saying:

The addressee [of the text], 'he writes, 'becomes aware of new semiosic [*sic*] possibilities and is thereby compelled to rethink the whole language, the entire inheritance of what has been said, can be said, and could or should be said....There is even a

structuralist equivalent to this view of literature, despite the notorious anti-humanism of structuralism in general. (p. 97)

Literature is an inherently valuable kind of writing with a highly specific history and the critic becomes the high priest of these literary rites, presiding with a due sense of his own authority over this self-legitimating process. Quoting Derek Attridge, he writes that 'if the text comforts and reassures by simply confirming prejudices according to some well-known verbal formulae... it cannot be called... literature'. (p. 91)

Literary texts are in some sense radical or subversive too. But any way, literature in them assimilates the world into itself. It does so with a peculiar kind of self-consciousness, allowing us to grasp the nature of our forms of life and language-games more vigilantly than usual. This case assigns literature an inherently critical force. It can explore and shake the deepest levels of agreement upon which not only our language, but also our sense of ourselves and the world we share and struggle over, depend and seduces us into a spirit of self-criticism. (p. 101)

Quoting Jonathan Culler he says that the study of literature involves an '...expansion of the self. But this is no longer a question of individual moral enrichment as it was for traditional literary humanism.' (p. 103) It improves us morally by making us more self-critical, self-conscious, flexible, provisional, open-minded and robustly skeptical of orthodoxies. In a way, literature can be the negative knowledge of human existence where we can give a name to the groundlessness of our projects, the fictional nature of the self and our exile from reality too and make it moral and meaningful.

In the chapter four entitled 'The nature of fiction', he says, perhaps theory of fiction is the most difficult aspect of the philosophy of literature, as well as the one that has attracted the most sustained scholarly attention. It is full of agreeable paradoxes and conundrums. Fiction and literature are not synonymous, despite Jonathan Culler's claim that 'to read a text as literature is to read it as fiction', and Morse Peckham's opinion that what makes a work literary is its fictional dimension. But he argues that Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* are usually ranked as literature, although neither is fictional or generally read as such.

He says, 'Literature is not confined to fiction, and fiction is not confined to literature.' Then, quoting Searle he says that 'Whether or not a work is literature is for the reader to decide; and whether or not it is fiction is for the author to decide.' (p. 109) This is further emphasized by the statement of Robert Brown and Martin Steinmann who insist that 'a discourse is fictional because its speaker or writer intends it to be so'. One might claim that taking a fictional text as factual does not alter the fact that it is fictional, since that is how the author conceived of it. The same goes for taking a factual text as fictional. Something can be factual and fictional at the same time. (p. 118)

Fiction is an ontological category, not in the first place a literary genre. A passionately sincere lyric poem is as fictional as *Lolita*. It is a question of how texts behave, and of how we treat them, not primarily of genre, and certainly not (as we shall see in a moment) of whether they are true or false. There is no good reason either to restrict the term to prose narrative. Only in the nineteenth century did

fiction become more or less synonymous with the novel. To confine the term to prose narrative simply means that you are likely to overlook some relevant aspects of poetry and drama, as well as some significant affinities between these forms.

There is a sense in which a novelist is pretending to pretend, since he is supposed to convince us that certain fictional events actually took place, while knowing that we disbelieve that. (p. 124) With reference to speech-act theory, Eagleton says that, works of literary art are not a particular kind of language but a particular kind of utterance. They are imitations of real-life speech acts; but by violating the usual conditions of a valid speech act, they imitate such utterances in a 'non-felicitous' kind of way. Fictional texts have often been seen as in some sense duplicitous too.

Speech-acts are verbal illusions which pose as true accounts of the world. Speech-act theory reformulates this duplicity in a suggestive new way. A literary work is one that lacks the so-called illocutionary force that would normally attach to the sentences of which it is made, and is thus a deviant utterance. The role of constatives and performatives are important in this context too. Fictions have an autonomous or self-referential quality providing it a peculiar force.

Literary works of art are the product of a great many historical factors: genre, language, history, ideology, and semiotic codes, unconscious desires, institutional norms, everyday experience, literary modes of production, other literary works and the like. It is rather that these factors are combined in a way that allows the work to evolve according to its own internal logic. They are self-constituting. They are clearly snatches of 'discourse' rather than specimens of 'language', which is to say that they are language bound up with specific situations. In everyday life, such situations play a major role in how we make sense of signs but even then literature is not a question of evoking our everyday responses, but of repressing them.

Some critics say that literary works are especially congenial to semantic ambiguity and richness of implication and this leads to argument. It is the slackness of the bond between sign and referent; between fiction and the real world that persuades us to see literary art as plural in meaning. Quoting Skinner, he says, we cannot grasp the meaning of a piece of discourse from its words alone. Nor will putting the words in context automatically disclose their sense. Instead, we need to decipher not just the meaning of the utterance but its force – which is to say, what the act of speaking or writing is trying to achieve. (EOL 105) Skinner distinguishes here between what he calls 'intention to do' and 'intention in doing'. The former refers to an aim on the part of the author, one which may or may not be realized.

In this chapter, Eagleton's reflections on this topic turn on the idea of a grammar as an important element of discourse as he says meaning a set of rules that determine how expressions are to be used in a form of practical life. Instead, a grammar determines what might be intelligibly asserted about the facts. A grammar does not mirror anything in reality, as Wittgenstein himself had once believed. It is an activity, not an image. (p. 156)

The fifth chapter entitled “Strategies”, begins with questions like ‘What, if anything, do literary theories have in common? What links semiotics and feminism, formalism and psychoanalysis, Marxism and hermeneutics or post-structuralism and reception aesthetics?’. Then he tries to give an explanation by saying that there is no single feature or set of features that all literary theories share in common. There is, however, in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing’ links them and this can be the case for psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory too.

There may not be a single feature shared by all these theories of literature; but there is one concept in particular which can illuminate a good many of them: the idea of a literary work as a *strategy* what he calls Theory of Everything, a literary equivalent to the physicist’s elusive TOE. He says that ‘Strategy projects out of innards the very historical and ideological subtext of literary work of art. The context of a literary work reveals a utopian unity of word and world, as we have seen already in the case of speech-act theory.’ (p. 171-2)

There is an obvious relation between this hermeneutical model and the concept of the text as strategy. To illustrate the idea of the text as strategy, he takes a brief glance at John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and makes an analysis of the writings of Charlotte Bronte, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce etc to find this mechanism. Then, he synthesizes, referring to Reception theory, that in a literary work of art.

... the reader is obliged to engage in a strategic enterprise which would tax even the most manically energetic of individuals: connecting, revising, code-switching, synthesising, correlating, depragmatising, imagebuilding, perspective-switching, inferring, normalising, recognising, ideating, negating, foregrounding, backgrounding, feeding back, contextualising, situation-building, coordinating, memory-transforming, expectation-modifying, illusion-building, gestalt-forming, image-breaking, blank-filling, concretising, consistency-building, structuring and anticipating....’ (p. 186)

Strategies constitute the vital link between work and reader, as the cooperative activity which brings the literary work into being in the first place; set off a series of different actions and interactions of a literary work. Thus the text is a set of instructions for the production of meaning, rather like an orchestral score. He continues saying that the meaning of the text is not an object but a practice. It emerges from a constant traffic between work and reader so that the act of reading becomes a project in which one receives back one’s own response in transfigured or defamiliarised form. (p. 187)

Quoting Jameson, he says that a literary work should be understood as ‘a reaction to the thought systems which it has chosen and incorporated in its own repertoire.’ (p. 188) Interpretation in a work of art deals with self-generating and self-legitimating. It can be done in two ways by considering literary work as objects and as

events. For American New Criticism, the literary text is a closed system of signs to be dissected. In Russian Formalism the work is also treated as an object though in the course of time it moves beyond a rather static view of it as ‘assemblage of devices’ to a more integrated, dynamic conception of its operations. The Formalists consider it as the process of ‘de-automating’ the reader’s perceptions. In this sense, the poem’s internal complexity exists for an ‘external’ end that there is a tentative transition at work here from the text as object to the text as strategic act. The Prague structuralists regard it as a functional system and a structural totality.

The text is less a solid structure than ‘a large labyrinthine garden’ with criss-crossing paths that permit us to take many different routes as he says:

Reading is thus more like strolling through Hyde Park than it is like crossing Westminster Bridge. These routes or ‘inferential walks’ through the artefact involve the reader in sometimes endorsing and sometimes repudiating the author’s codes, sometimes not knowing what the ‘sender’s’ rules are, trying to extrapolate such interpretive guidelines from disconnected fragments of data, proposing certain tentative codes of her own to make sense of problematic segments of the work, and so on. (p.191)

Quoting Eco Eagleton says that the aesthetic of text continually transforms its denotations into new connotations, none of its items stop at their first interpretant and contents are never received for their own sake but rather as the sign-vehicle for something else. In this process each feature of the work is actualized by the reader which then spurs it as a consequence into new interpretive activity.

Only by grasping the function of this textual structure in relation to a context and seeing it as performance the structure can itself be properly laid bare. In this sense, the structure of the text is not the final datum, rather it needs to become relevant through the function of that text which is equivalent to the sense that the text is best seen as a strategy. Thus, he says that a strategy is precisely a structure which is broadly determined by its ends. It is function that determines structure in relation to its context. This may lead towards extratextuality and intertextuality. Myth or utopian quality of literary works is included in this system.

Eagleton formulates a system of strategy by saying that it is more than a matter of dynamic organization. Eagleton is rather a structure with a certain built-in intentionality, one organized to achieve certain effects. It is a project, not simply a system. Its internal disposition is determined by its active relations to what it addresses and as Jakobson says, a literary work is ‘a complex, multi-dimensional structure, integrated by the unity of aesthetic purpose’. (p. 29)

A strategy is the kind of structure that is forced to re-totalize itself from moment to moment in the light of the functions it has to perform. It is powered by an intention in the sense of a purposeful design or set of designs inscribed within it, not in the sense of a ghostly force propelling it from the outside. Moreover, the structure of

literary works generates events which can then react back on that structure and transform its terms. Since this two-way process is also true of so-called ordinary language, literary texts perform in a more dramatic, perceptible way what takes place in everyday speech. (p. 200)

In effect, then, the unconscious is always a subtext crafted by the conscious mind. Like the history and ideology which enter the literary work as subtext, it can never be known in the raw. We know it only in the form in which the ego has strategically shaped it. This is much the same like a dream for Freud which is a disguised wish-fulfillment, and to say that it contains both a real wish and an imaginary fulfillment.

Thus, strategies are purposive projects, but not the intentional utterances of a single subject. Strategies are neither objects nor unitary acts. If they are thoroughly worldly affairs, it is not because they ‘reflect’ or ‘correspond to’ reality but because, rather in the manner of a Wittgensteinian grammar, they organize it into significant shape by deploying certain rule-governed techniques. The concept of strategy finds parallels between different forms of literary theory and makes such connections always gratifying to philosophy and psychology strategically.

The book refreshes the critical tempo of literature by making a walk through the remarkable tracks of events of literature till now. But it is noticed that his interpretation is somehow dominated by the principles outlined by Wittgenstein and Lamarque and he liberally accounts for the reader-response factors as well as text linguistics plus analysis of speech-acts to consider validity of literature in our time. Quoting Barthes, he says that no literature in the world has ever answered the question it asked. The text is not bound to provide an answer like a medical diagnosis is meant to do. It may simply represent a response to the questions it poses, rather than a literal solution to them. If there are both acceptable and non-acceptable ways in which a work may resolve a problem, there are also acceptable and non-acceptable ways in which it may leave it unanswered. (p. 174). As the title suggests, Eagleton writes a history of literary theories that developed during the modernist and postmodernist periods with some of his own comments that he experienced as a (Marxist) literary critic. A reader fails to trace anything fresh that he expects from a critic of Eagleton’s status.

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